

1934



1934

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ALL NEW

AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

"They Took It All Away", by Barry N. Malzberg • "The Strange Rider of the Good Year", by David R. Bunch • "And Parity for All", by Felix Gotschalk • "The Amorophobe", by Wayne Wightman • plus an Interview with Harlan Ellison . . . outspoken, candid & colorful.



FUTURES FANTASTIC (technology tomorrow) • plus Books, Films, Fans, Reviews • Interior Illus by Freeman, Barta, Schwartz and Day



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AMAZING/FANTASTIC

November, 1980

AMAZING STORIES, which has been issued on a quarterly basis, will now be published six times a year. Our goal is twelve times a year.

The step forward was made possible by merging *FANTASTIC* with *AMAZING*. Our efforts will no longer be divided. One newsstand display space is easier to get than two . . . *AMAZING/FANTASTIC* will be ONE image — ONE title. The best of both in reading pleasure. *AMAZING STORIES* was founded in 1926 by Hugo Gernsback, and has enjoyed 54 years of continuous publishing history. We look forward to the next 54: let's go it together.

Arthur Bernhard, Publisher

IN THIS ISSUE

WE'RE KICKING off our newly combined magazine and publishing schedule with the meatiest issue of the year — one with a pace we'll strive to maintain and shoot to top. Highlight of this issue for many will be the outspoken remarks of gifted, multi-level writer and personality Harlan Ellison, a man who inspires admiration, controversy, imitation (but watch out) and jealousy and who, above all that is a personable, likable guy. He is currently writing a story especially for *AMAZING/FANTASTIC*.

Longtime contributor to and onetime editor of *AMAZING/FANTASTIC* Barry N. Malzberg returns to our pages with an offbeat, psychological fantasy typical of his work and sure to entertain. David R. Bunch is back again with a thought-provoking yarn — no rest for the grey cells here, either. Satirist Wayne Wightman does it to us once more in "The Amorphobe", a Wonderlandish lesson on love. Felix Gotschalk fashions an unusual viewpoint for us in his tale of a computerized civilization of sorts. And four other fiction writers give us their visions of time warps, the ultra-intelligent machine, bewitching medical artistry and a futuristic inflation fighter. Have fun!

We are beginning a Science Series Feature this issue entitled, "Futures Fantas-

tic", by physicist J. Ray Dettling who will be examining the many exciting technological advances we may be enjoying in the near future, if we but choose to do so. His message is counter to doomsday theorists who see only the problems and not the possibilities. Walter B. Hendrickson, Jr. documents the facts about Russian vs. American efforts in space; Steven Dimeo gives us a deeper look at a blockbuster whose creator has introduced a new era of sf filmmaking; and guest editorialist Paul Collins lends us a little savvy on how to succeed — good words from the very successful Australian editor and publisher of Void Publications. Book reviewer Tom Staicar does double duty this issue with his regular column plus the fine interview with Harlan Ellison. And Steve Fahnestalk gives us a special lowdown on fandom, latest cons and small press reviews.

On our cover is the work of noted science fiction artist Dean Ellis. He has created cover illustrations for many paperbacks and book jackets and has a studio in New York City. This piece is from the artist's portfolio. Illustrators Freeman, Barta, Schwartz and Day complete our beautiful package in fine style.

P.S. Have you noticed yet that, not only are we getting better, but we're getting bigger, as well?

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COMBINED WITH FANTASTIC ©

AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

FOUNDED IN 1926 BY HUGO GERNSBACH



Nov., 1980

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A TALE OF THE PAST, FITTING FOR THE FUTURE

I hope the following parable will help some science fiction writer somewhere; it holds a lesson for him as it does anyone who will listen to depression mongers.

An old writer who was dedicated to his craft had one great failing: he only ever achieved a fifty percent success rate. No matter how hard he tried, he still received half his stories back with rejection slips. Writing science fiction was his love, his work, and he had little time for the world news, the social problems of those around him, or anything else that worried the masses. He was content to be left alone and make a living by writing his stories.

One day, his son arrived home on leave from university. He said to his father, "Why don't you stop being a hack, and write less? Put quality into your work. You'll save on paper and electricity, and imagine all the effort you'll save by not working on so many stories! Besides, there's a big depression coming and you'll soon be only selling a few of your stories."

The father reasoned to himself: "My son listens to the radio, and knows everything because he hears the news, and a university student should know about world affairs."

So the writer cut down on his story output and had more leisure time. He wrote fewer stories, but still received fifty percent of his stories back from the editors.

Before his over-educated son went back to university, the writer told him, "You know lad, you were right, there must be a depression heading our way. I am selling fewer of my stories than ever, but at least I am saving on paper, electricity and effort."

You've already guessed the moral of the story of course. I have suffered myself from people telling me what I should do, why I couldn't publish a profit-making science fiction magazine in this country, and why I couldn't possibly write because I didn't go to university. I achieved both of these things, and have gone on to become Australia's major science fiction publisher, having edited more local sf&f than anyone in the field — not to mention the fact I have sold more short stories than the majority of Australia's sf&f writing fraternity.

I've often wondered how many people Out There could write a novel which would be accepted straight off, if only that person would 'give it a go'. The same applies I guess to any other subject, like sport, where a state team is only the best of those who want to be in the team! — imagine how many people who would have made the coach much happier if only they had turned up for the trials . . .

So if you're a reader of sf, give it a go — assuredly some of Amazing's readership would become excellent writers. Don't take notice of the Depression Mongers — only those who think depression will receive depression. And if I may be permitted a mixed metaphor: The path is always brighter farther along the dim road . . .

**HARLAN ELLISON:
INTERVIEW/PROFILE**

by Tom Staicar

This article is based on conversations with Ellison and on his remarks during a panel discussion at the Nova IV convention at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan in March of this year.

I HAVE an unarguable truth to impart: a room with Harlan in it is quite a different thing from a room without him in it. Within minutes after arriving in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel in Rochester (where I had been waiting to meet him), he was arguing with the desk clerk about signing the register and giving his home address instead of the agreed upon practice of using the university account name. He had recently been unjustly accused of assault by a groupie who learned his hotel room number and made up a lie about him, although she had never even been in his room. Ellison also avoids junk mail and was loathe to place himself on a hotel mailing list. I stood a few feet away, waiting to see who would come out the winner (it was Ellison).

He argued over a ten cent fee for a free drink in the bar and a complimentary breakfast. Finally, he paid the dime and gave away the drink coupon. He never drinks liquor. By the time he was done registering, the people behind him in line, one of whom got a free drink, the desk clerk and two assistants and a variety of other people were aware of the fact that Harlan Ellison was there.

Politely and quietly, I approached him and told him my name. He shook my hand and greeted me warmly. "Oh, right! Tom Staicar. You're going to interview me tonight. I'm really sorry we were so late. We got lost and we drove around Detroit for an hour. By the way, I really like your writing. I not only like what you said in your reviews, I liked the fact that they were so well-written. It's rare to find that these



days."

That blew my rehearsed introduction. I thanked him and then didn't have time to say more. He immediately invited me to have dinner with him. I went up to his room, along with two people from the committee, as Harlan put away his things.

Those of you who have always wanted to know what such an activity is like will be interested in the following information. Harlan really does give first attention to his typewriter, which he takes wherever he travels. The case has a circular Mickey Mouse Club insignia on it. He unzipped the case and set up the small, manual Olympia typewriter on the desk, with paper and correction fluid ready nearby. He is a writer and would write tonight, in the early morning and any chance he got if need be, unlike other writers who wait to get home.

He set up a beeper next to his bed. "In case I get any important calls back in California this will tell me," he explained to me. He then set up a small transistor radio, using the TV as a stand. He never watches TV, at all, and he turned the radio onto a classical music station.

While eating dinner, Harlan answered my questions about his writing and his current projects, one of which was the bitter court battle going on in Los Angeles. He sued Paramount and ABC for allegedly stealing the idea for the TV series *Future Cop* from a Ben Bova and Ellison story collaboration called "Brillo," which is reprinted in *Partners in Wonder*.

"This lawsuit has cost me \$90,000 and five weeks in court so far," the writer told me. "I mean, I make a good living but

\$90,000 to spare I don't have. Nobody has. I may very well lose. There's no guarantee that I'm going to win at all and if I lose I'm right back where I started. I did it, not to win a huge settlement, because they tried to get me to settle out of court a number of times and I would not. I wanted to win so that other writers would know that someone was trying to fight.

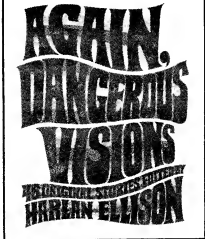
"All they are out there is ex-C.P.A.'s, or ex-agents, or ex-publicists who have gotten in charge of an art form, and they have turned the writers there into chattel. They brutalize them and they steal from them and they steal from them regularly and they do not understand that they are not allowed to steal. I've had producers point to a piece of work and say, well, let's do something like that. They don't know that that's stealing. That's why I went to court, to bring that message home to them as forcefully as possible.

"I have less to lose than the other writers. If they blacklist me I can always work in books. If they don't let me work in books I can always work in magazines, and if I'm kicked out of magazines I can go back to being a bricklayer. I've still got my ticket."

((A Los Angeles federal jury recently awarded Harlan Ellison and Ben Bova \$337,000 for violations of their Common Law Copyright. Defendants Paramount Pictures and ABC-TV were ordered to pay \$182,500 in compensatory damages and \$154,500 in punitive damages to the authors for plagiarism.))

Harlan's books have been translated into sixteen languages for sale all over the world. In France, he has attracted considerable attention in the non-SF media and has become a *cause celebre*. "Jean-Pierre Dionnet is the publisher of the original *Heavy Metal* in France, which is called *Metal Hurlant*. I met him when I was in France two years ago and he said he was anxious to publish my books. After he had published four of them I found myself on the front page of *Le Monde* and they were calling me 'the great literary find of the decade.' I'm certainly not going to argue with that, I mean, if they believe that I'm not going to disabuse them.

"They are not publishing me as a science fiction writer. I'm being published in the way they publish Poe over there, or Ambrose Bierce. They've published *Gentle-*



man Junkie, Strange Wine, Partners in Wonder and Love Ain't Nothing But Sex Misspelled so far. The sales keep growing and growing.

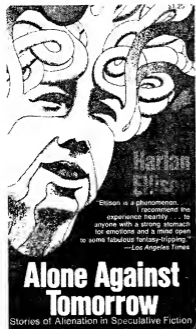
"*Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, which is the most prestigious literary newspaper in France had me on the front page. I have my own translator who is a friend of mine, named Jacques Chambon. He comes to visit me twice a year and I'm very happy about the care he takes in his work. However, in Israel for instance, and in Germany, I have no idea who the publishers are giving them to for translation. It may be some professional translator who may or may not like what he's reading. He may or may not like my style and if not, he'll try to change it into John Cheever or Bernard Malamud."

Along with Mark Twain, Ellison ranks Jorge Luis Borges and W.S. Merwin as two of his major literary influences. Although his style is strictly original, he told me he has drawn some elements from the other writers. "From the work of Borges one draws many things. He is an endless cornucopia of attitudes, and he owes little to the European tradition of writing. Principally, what I think I've derived from Borges is a sense of misdirection—of saying one thing but meaning another entirely; of resonating in the subtext of your writing. Borges is a wonder, an absolute wonder. I met him briefly at a reception at UCLA and it affected me profoundly.

"The same is true for W.S. Merwin, who is known as a poet but who has done a couple of books of short, allegorical stories

which were mostly published in the *New Yorker*. They are parables grounded in a kind of magic realism, where something is very real and very concrete but it means something else entirely.

"The title of my new novel *Shrikes*, is a word that means something in terms of the novel. The shrike is a butcher bird that stores its larder for the winter by impaling the dead worms or mice and things on thorns or the barbs of a barbed-wire fence. It will save them until they rot. Because of that, the whole idea of the shrike becomes symbolic, paradigmatic as it were, of those who impale others, castrate or defenestrate or brutalize others. That's the kind of thing I've picked up from Merwin and to some extent from Borges, although Borges has a gentle quality to even the harshest of his images.



"There's a phrase in my new story 'All the Lies That are My Life,' where I say when someone has done something really awful that 'it's the ugliness of simply being human.' That's a very meaningful phrase for me and it's a pivotal phrase in the story. Whether anyone else will pick up on it or

not, I have no way of knowing, but it's the kind of linchpin phrase that will illuminate, reveal and elucidate the subtext in totality for whoever is reading it.

"My great sorrow is that I am confronted constantly by slovenly readers. People who have been reading so much bad science fiction or bad general fiction, that they are not willing to work with the material. They're not willing to extend themselves to see that there's more going on. Like reading *Moby Dick*. You can read it on several different levels and if you only read it as an adventure story then you miss all the wonders that lie beneath."

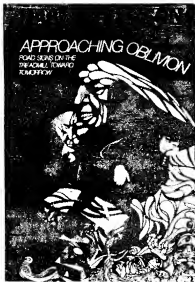
AT THE SF convention, Harlan was asked to sign autographs, conduct an auction and give a lecture and reading session in a marathon all-day series of con activities. He also showed up at a private party for the con people the night before. I was present at all these events and noticed one thing at each one: people are very rude and gauche to Harlan Ellison, without any provocation on his part. The majority of the people who put on the Nova convention were friendly. I'm talking about a small group of individuals who tried to draw attention to themselves by heckling Harlan, insulting him by telling him they didn't like his books, and otherwise making rude remarks within his hearing or to his face during the lecture or auction. Harlan Ellison doesn't ask everyone to agree with him but I found him to be a warm and friendly person who picks his targets carefully, weeding out innocent and well-meaning bystanders from people who either attack him or do something he considers evil to someone else, such as a producer or publisher who cheats a writer.

During the convention, Harlan had a lot to say about science fiction and fandom. "Fiction is not the art of truth," he said to an audience during a panel discussion. "It is the art of verisimilitude, a sleight-of-hand trick. The material is not true but we must make the reader believe it. It must convince the reader even if it is a true story. I will do something such as I did in my story 'Croatoan' (which is reprinted in *Strange Wine*), in which the improbable is presented to the reader in stages, with details being added and added until the audience comes to accept it. Writing is based on the quality of the craft, not on portrayal of the

literal truth.

"I actually read very little SF. I read one book a day, most of the year, but I must tell you that most of SF bores me. At its best I enjoy it, such as much of the work of Kate Wilhelm, Robert Silverberg, Thomas Disch and something sensational like Gene Wolfe's new book *The Shadow of the Torturer*. But I usually like something such as William Kotzwinkle or Norman Mailer's better stuff, for example, rather than SF.

"Even my dear friend for many many years, Isaac Asimov, wrote most of his SF decades ago. He has since done much better work in other fields such as science non-fiction books. He admits that he is not proudest of his stories such as those in *I, Robot*. He is not a great litterateur or stylist in SF, based on that old work. He is entertaining and he knows how to put a story together. I think he has done much better work in other fields.



"SF suffers from a lack of characters, memorable, good characters, among other things. I also think that fans hold back the SF writers. I say, don't let the audience tell you what is good. I don't give a damn if you all hate my books. I can't be concerned with it. I don't give a

damn what you want. I'm delighted if you love it, but I write for myself and I won't pay attention to the audience.

"A lot of writers in the field burned themselves out by doing only what the audience wanted. These fans put the writers into one niche and then they were stuck there. Every time I have written a story, people tell me they want me to write another one just like it. They hate the new one, why don't I write another one like the previous one. Then I win an award and the story goes into the best-of-the-year anthologies and people grow to like it. Then that story is used as the example when I write another one. They don't realize that if I had listened to them before, I wouldn't have gone on to write the next one and the one after that. I won't write copies of 'Repent, Harlequin...' or 'Jeffy is Five' or anything else.

"Harold MacMillan once said 'It has never been my experience that lack of intelligence kept someone from having an opinion.' I say, the old expression that 'everybody is entitled to their opinion' is wrong. Everyone is entitled to their informed opinion."

In conversations with me, Harlan Ellison expressed his main concern of the moment: the fact that people are not at all living up to their potential or using their time or their intelligence to read and to better their lives.

We were discussing his output of stories and I pointed out to him that most people misunderstand his positive, uplifting attitude, concentrating on the violence and the horror which form the background for the triumphs of his characters. I mentioned that almost every one of the stories he has written has a positive statement to make.

"That's right, Tom. Almost every one of them is positive. A story like 'I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream' says: even at the final moment, of extreme torment, when a human being knows that he will spend the rest of his life in Hell, in unutterable anguish, nevertheless he performs the courageous act. He does the noble deed. What the story says is that there is an unquenchable spark in the human race, that cannot be stilled, neither in the face of gods, nor devils, nor thumbscrews. That the human spirit will prevail. That there is courage in all of us. And that, even when

we know we are dooming ourselves we do it, and that's a very positive statement.

"I believe that there is a nobility in the human race, and my anger, which is expressed in my stories as violence, is that love-hate relationship that says: you are capable of painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling, you are capable of walking on the Moon, you are capable of writing *Moby Dick*. Why? Why do you settle for Kentucky Colonel fried chicken? Why do you settle for *Charlie's Angels*? Why do you settle for cheap novels and fast sex and dope? Why? When you can do any Goddamn thing?" ●

The Interstellar Connection

Book Reviews

by Tom Staicar

Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo. Edited By Charles C. Ryan (St. Martin's Press, \$9.95).

Like *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic*, *Galileo* is a magazine which seeks new talent. Since its first, small press-run in 1975, *Galileo* has been a labor of love for its editorial and production staff, as well as a resounding success at its goal of discovering new talent in the SF field.

Unfortunately, computer foul-ups and distribution problems spoiled the first years of the magazine's existence. One computer company went out of business but held onto the precious subscribers' address information, making it impossible to find out where to mail the forthcoming issue. Months passed between appearances of the publication, and many hundreds of newstand purchasers and subscribers blamed *Galileo*. The unprecedented 57,000 subscribers for the young magazine grew discontented. It is not known at this time whether new distribu-

STARRY MESSENGER.



tion ideas will work out well or poorly for *Galileo*, which might return to limited bookstore sales and advertising campaigns to reach subscribers.

Despite all of the above, Charles C. Ryan and his staff managed to bring together science articles, book reviews, short stories and serials which formed a fine magazine. Most of the SF publications have had "Best of . . ." books, or even annuals of that type, and these have varied from thought-provoking to ennui-inducing. *Starry Messenger* happens to be one of the highest quality collections of the past few years.

Ryan has selected with care, balancing big SF honchos (Alan Dean Foster, Brian Aldiss and Harlan Ellison) with new names and rapidly rising stars (Kevin O'Donnell, Jr. and others). The Connie Willis story called "Samaritan" tugs at the emotions like a Vonda McIntyre tale, "The Oak and the Ash" by John Alfred Taylor has one of the best shock endings I have seen in quite a while, and Kevin O'Donnell's "Do Not Go Gentle" shows the talent and expertise in use of background details which have brought praise to this young man for his novels. The *Galileo* stories in this volume show individuality and freshness in treatment of their themes. I suggest that purchase of the St. Martin's hardcover edition might be practical, as *Starry*

Messenger will be turned to for re-reading, and possibly loans to friends.

Kurt Vonnegut: Slaughterhouse-Five, The Sirens of Titan, Player Piano, Cat's Cradle, Breakfast of Champions and Mother Night. (Octopus/Heinemann, \$10.95).

This publisher has begun a program of issuing omnibus volumes at a low price, bringing together novels of contemporary writers such as Gore Vidal, John LeCarre and Graham Greene. *Kurt Vonnegut* is the first to include some science fiction novels.

Vonnegut, as long ago as his famous article "Science Fiction" in the September 5, 1965 issue of the *New York Times Book Review*, disavowed any such label on his writing. He noted that he had discovered he was a "science fiction writer" when he read the book review columns of the early 60's, adding: "I have been a sore-headed occupant of a file-drawer labeled 'science-fiction' ever since, and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a tall white fixture in a comfort station."

KURT VONNEGUT

Slaughterhouse-Five
The Sirens of Titan
Player Piano
Cat's Cradle
Breakfast of Champions
Mother Night

COMPLETE & UNABRIDGED

A glance at a checklist of short fiction by Kurt Vonnegut shows such places of publication as *Golox*, *Venture* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. It also reveals places like *Collier's* and *The Ladies Home Journal*, but his SF work made it easy to wrap his writing in a neat package, tie a bow on it and set it on a convenient shelf. Like Ray Bradbury, Vonnegut rose to tremendous heights of mass market popularity while some of the SF writers stayed on a comfortable but predictable level of book sales.

Most of the novels which are presented unabridged in this Octopus/Heinemann book have the trappings and hardware of science fiction. *Slaughterhouse-Five* has space aliens and time travel. *The Sirens of Titan* involves aliens, and *Player Piano* explores the effects of technology on human lives. *Cat's Cradle* was a Science Fiction Book Club selection I once purchased, and *Breakfast of Champions* features SF writer Kilgore Trout and several other characters who are released from the bondage of serving the writer in his fiction. *Mother Night*, however, has no SF elements.

Kurt Vonnegut is not considered a science fiction writer, or a member of the SF "lodge" which he poked fun at in his 1965 article. Regardless of this fact, he has written about aliens, time travel and technology as well as anyone, and this might be a good time to re-read these six excellent novels and assess them in the light of today's world. There is much of lasting merit in these books, the novels he wrote before the current *Slapstick and Jailbird*. In place of the pressure to stay within the "SF lodge," he was burdened by the pressure of readers and publishers who made him a cult hero and a big-bestseller-star-writer. His combination of wry humor, bitter sarcasm and wistful sentiment are Twain-like at times. I find the novels of Kurt Vonnegut quite apropos today, in light of our current state of affairs, whether we call them SF or not.

Shared Tomorrows: Science Fiction in Collaboration. Edited by Bill Pronzini and Barry N. Malzberg. (St. Martin's, \$10.95). Pronzini and Malzberg have collaborated on a number of SF and mystery stories and books and it is fitting that they

SHARED TOMORROWS

SCIENCE + FICTION
IN
COLLABORATION



Edited by Bill Pronzini
and Barry N. Molzberg

co-edited this anthology. As they note in their co-written introduction, SF breaks the usual rule of fiction writers working alone on their private visions.

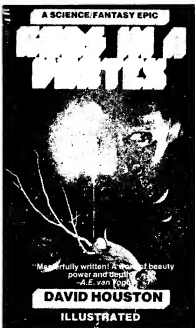
Shared Tomorrows scores on all fronts: entertainment value of the stories, a good representative sample of the writers who have collaborated, and selections that are little-known but which merit reading.

There is a story by Karen Anderson and her husband Poul, one by James Blish with Damon Knight, a Pohl and Kornbluth classic and a Gavagan's Bar tale by Pratt and de Camp. The recent favorite "Prose Bowl" by the editors rounds out the collection. These two work well together as editors and as writers.

Gods In A Vortex By David Houston. (Leisure Books, \$1.75). David Houston writes for *Starlog* and had one novel published entitled *Alien Perspective* (Leisure Books, \$1.75). He shows a maturity and writing talent which could be the envy of veterans of a dozen novels. Against a complex and imaginative background of a system of inhabited worlds, Houston deals with the struggle of individuals to find freedom in the face of government power and repression. The political viewpoint here is Libertarian, but the novel is not a simple soapbox polemic.

Ideas are the weapons in *Gods In A Vortex*, as in the passage in which black balloons are floated across the skies to transmit a taped message to the people. The challenge is made to the government to censor or distort the message, which would prove that the media are lying to the citizens. The government thus cannot help but broadcast the talk verbatim, giving free publicity on a world-wide scale.

Gods In A Vortex was illustrated by the author, who is a good artist. David Houston is a writer to watch.



Cosmic Encounter, by A. E. van Vogt (Doubleday, \$8.95). Lately it has not been fashionable for critics to like A.E. van Vogt. The poor man has contributed much more to SF than any of his critics and will simply have to make do with tens of millions of satisfied readers and a tall stack of acknowledged classics like *Slan*, *The Weapon Shops of Isher* and *The World of Null-A*.

As one of his avid fans for many years, I was honored to meet Mr. van Vogt

recently, followed by corresponding with him. He told me: "I have not gotten good reviews in recent years. In a small way this disturbs me — but it's more a shaking of my head over the standards by which the critic is judging me. I understand what I am doing. I believe I shall endure in the field long after each new wave has spent itself, and the next wave with its automatic ideas of the decade starts up grandly, expressing the inner power and beliefs of another shortlived set of attitudes." I must add that I agree with him wholeheartedly.

As a science fiction book selector for the collection of the University of Michigan Graduate Library, I read such journals as *Kirkus Reviews*. The anonymous reviewer in that publication blasted *Cosmic Encounter*, and apparently the entire field of SF and van Vogt himself, for its "unpardonable illiteracies" and for being "soggy and pointless." Fortunately, now that I have read the book I know that the *Kirkus* reviewer was off-base. *Cosmic Encounter* will please van Vogt fans and is not a disappointment in any way. It has a point, and is science fictional of course, but definitely not soggy.

Like no one else can do so well, van Vogt spans millions of years in this novel, probes the secret behind the Big Bang, and places together in one book a resident of the 83rd Century A.D., a group of Caribbean pirates, and a spaceship caught in a space-time backlash. Further complicating matters is the collapse and disappearance of forty million years of history. The actions of a certain Captain Fletcher in 1704 will have far-reaching implications upon history itself.

At one point, an enormous space battlecruiser plunges into the Caribbean Sea causing a sudden boiling and then a rapid super-cooling to below zero. About 30,000 robots are trapped on board until the hot Sun thaws the hundreds of feet of ice and unleashes the robots in the world of 1704.

I was delighted by *Cosmic Encounter*, a novel in the best tradition of this writer whose thinking processes are as enjoyable to watch as his characters' actions. ●



A 10,000-person future space settlement concept

FUTURES FANTASTIC

The first article in a series on the possibilities of achieving a Utopian future scenario.

Humanity's Golden Age

by J. Ray Dettling

WHO SAYS we are not living in an exciting time? Not only is this an exciting time, it is the most exciting period in history; and for that matter, it is the most exciting period we are ever likely to encounter—anytime!

You doubt this? Understandable, because the action is just getting started, and as yet, you may not have seen enough to get the *big picture*. And the *big picture* comes from a perspective view of the future based on current technological trends. This article will preview some of these trends, and hopefully, the *big picture* will begin to clear up.

We may look upon ourselves as members of a crew on a timeship plunging into the future at a breathtaking pace, and through our forward viewer we are beginning to see things that are raising funda-

J. Ray Dettling is a physicist currently working on the Space Shuttle Program three days a week. The rest of his time is spent writing and lecturing on science fiction and speculative fact. One of his sf stories, "Tutor", is presented in this issue. FUTURES FANTASTIC is based on a book currently in progress.

mental questions about our very nature. Old religions, philosophies, and sciences are making way for radically new concepts, ideas often disturbing, but always fascinating.

Looking forward from our timeship, many technological possibilities are apparent. We can see a world shared by intelligent machines, artificial organic life, and ageless immortal humans. Millions of people live permanently in autonomous space colonies. We see a world of total communication, unlimited food, unlimited energy, and unlimited resources. It is a world without pollution, crime or war.

We become disturbed by other possibilities as we glance along alternate courses where large scale directed energy weapons (high powered lasers and particle beams) silently loom over every nation on Earth ready to strike on command. And still other avenues display a world, starved of energy and overburdened with runaway population growth, writhing in its own waste and economically too weak to recover.

From our vantage point we see that much of this could have been avoided if humanity had had the foresight to recognize the infinite resources that were available outside its home planet. Without expanding its domain on new territory, humanity was destined to wither away like a plant whose roots have outgrown its pot.

But if we let ourselves continue along that course, we would never get a chance to see the *big picture*, and that would defeat the purpose of this article. So we direct our attention back on our original

unlimited energy, unlimited food, immortality, world peace, travel to the stars . . .

course, where fusion powered spacecraft travel to any planet in the Solar System in a matter of days, while exotic new forms of propulsion are pushing our first ships to the stars. Enormous satellites beam solar generated microwave energy to Earth-based receivers, while powerful laser beams lift spaceships to Earth orbit. Wrist communicators and wall-sized flat screen

TV systems form the basis of our interaction with each other, and on the far side of the moon, giant radio telescopes beam messages to extra-terrestrial civilizations.

Beyond that, the technological image gets cloudy, but we see hints of large scale planetary engineering programs; some just simple terraforming, and others much more ambitious. For example, we can just barely see the large automated machinery dismantling Jupiter into Earth-sized fragments to provide more land. In another direction robot technicians are activating a group of cryocapsules that have kept humans frozen for several centuries. And

technology . . . Aladdin's lamp or Pandora's Box??

at the limit of our instrument's resolution, we find large underground vaults sheltering and supporting billions of human brains linked remotely to inorganic mechanized bodies scattered about the galaxy.

Indeed there is much more to see, and it is tempting to set the magnification to the limit, but it won't tell us what we set out to prove; namely, that the most exciting period in history is happening right now. To do this we will have to narrow our field of view and take a closer examination of some technological trends over the next, say fifty years.

Let us first zoom in on *communication*. The development of communication satellites along with super-compact high speed computers, laser transceivers, and fiber optics is presently spawning a revolution in communication that will make present day radio, television and telephones appear as primitive as smoke signals. Nevertheless, these developments are all realities today. All that is left is the engineering efforts that go into integrating these subsystems into a complete practical communication system. And this effort is already well underway.

Setting our sights on the year 2000, we see most homes equipped with a communication/information system consisting of a wall-sized flat screen to which is attached a terminal. From this terminal, anyone can instantly contact anyone else. Transcontinental calls are no more difficult or expensive than local calls, since they are

all processed by the same system of geosynchronous satellites 35,680 kilometers above the Earth.

With the same terminal you can request a library book, the morning paper, past issues of your favorite magazine or, for that matter, any document that was ever written. The latest fashions, the day's mail, or a course on virtually any subject can also live up your screen on command. This is literally your window to the world.

How will this world of super communications effect transportation? It is sometimes said that these are opposing technologies—one tends to undermine the need for the other. For example, efficient teleconferencing via large screen transceivers reduces the requirement for actual physical meetings of the parties involved. Also much of the work force would be able to perform their function at home, thus it appears at first glance that the need for transportation technology will decrease. Well, let us adjust our viewer and focus in on transportation over the same time-scale.

ultra-intelligent men and machines, cosmic engineering, artificial worlds, artificial suns . . .

We immediately see that transportation technology is also booming, and with little thought we realize that transportation and communication technologies are competitive, and that means, as one improves so must the other. The communication revolution will require transportation to make similar advances. And a close look at the screen indicates that indeed it will.

For short ranges, super wide body aircraft carrying over 1000 passengers are commonplace, while long range hypersonic transports fly at extremely high altitudes using non-polluting hydrogen fuel. These aircraft travel eight times faster than the jets of the '70s.

Laser elevators are in full operation. This system employs high energy ground based laser beams, developed in the late 1980s, directed toward the rear of a spacecraft. The beam's energy vaporizes inexpensive fuel, such as water, which in turn

propels the spacecraft. Special sensors keep the beam on target. The system has proven so effective that trips to Earth orbit have become commonplace. And from Earth orbit the concept is used in the reverse direction. In this case solar pumped lasers direct their energy down at heat exchangers placed on top of commercial aircraft. An electronic data link keeps the beam on target and automatically shuts it off should something go wrong.

Can the latest technological trends and their synergistic interactions achieve Utopia for mankind in the distant future?

Ground transportation has also made great strides. A transcontinental subway, proposed in the late '60s has finally been completed. Here trains riding on magnetic cushions in evacuated tubes travel over 22,000 kilometers per hour. These trains can shuttle passengers from Los Angeles to New York in 21 minutes at a cost of \$21.00.

Finally, as we gaze into the early 21st century, we see the beginning of what may be the demise of personal vehicles. Who needs them when computerized driverless taxis are just minutes away from your wrist communicator?

Being duly impressed by our glimpse into the future of communication and transportation, we wonder about other present day concerns. Energy is the first thing that comes to mind, and the psychotronic pickup on our control console immediately changes channels. All avenues seem to indicate the same thing. In the short run the energy crunch will get worse. The cost of fossil fuels continues to escalate as reserves dwindle, and throughout the early '80s the world is in a transient state of technological pandemonium as it scrambles about seeking alternate energy production avenues.

Many sources are identified and tested, including geothermal, nuclear, solar, coal gasification, wind, etc., but by the end of the '80s, there seems to be little doubt that

the real solution to the energy problem lies in either *controlled thermonuclear fusion* (demonstrated by several methods in the late '70s and early '80s) or *space based solar power*.

Thermonuclear fusion, the power behind stars and hydrogen bombs, received heavy government support in the '80s, and by the mid '90s a prototype fusion reactor demonstrated that safe, limitless power could be generated without the inherent hazards of conventional fission reactors. Soon more reactors were constructed, and it was found that the neutrons from the reaction could be used to neutralize radioactive wastes that accumulated from the fission reactors, which themselves were slowly being phased out.

While controlled thermonuclear fusion continues on Earth, a construction crew is engaged in a massive solar power development project nearly 36,000 kilometers above the Earth. At this altitude the satellite appears stationary in the sky.

Having already demonstrated the feasibility of satellite solar power stations (SSPS) on a small scale in the late '80s, the Department of Energy opted to subsidize the construction of a full-scale commercial power plant. It will consist of more than 50 square kilometers of low cost photovoltaic cells passively collecting and converting sunlight to electricity. The electrical energy, in turn, will be converted to microwaves and beamed down to Earth based receivers to be reconverted to electricity. Once completed, the satellite will deliver 5000 megawatts of continuous electrical power—enough to supply half the power requirements of New York City. By the year 2020, we see a string of these satellites supplying half the world's energy needs.

Future communications . . . literally your Window to the World . . .

Suddenly we are troubled by the thought that the year 2020 is 40 years in the future, and many of us would not be alive to experience it. Although only a fleeting thought, it is enough to tickle the psychotronic sensor. The image flutters on the

screen as if searching for the proper time channel, then everything clears up.

Teams of gerontologists (those who study the causes of aging) all over the world are developing techniques to slow down the aging process. Earlier work in the '60s identified the major causes of aging, and studies in the '70s with special anti-oxidant drugs were so encouraging that some therapies were already being tested on humans in the '80s. By the year 2000, 20 years have been added to our life expectancy. The elimination of cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases account for 10 of those years. The other 10 is credited to anti-aging therapy.

Future transportation: 1000-passenger aircraft traveling 8 times faster than present aircraft; transcontinental sub- ways; computerized, dri- verless taxis . . .

But this is just the beginning. Beyond the year 2000, radically new therapies are developed. Special enzymes are mass produced through recombinant DNA processes. Also, many of the same therapies of the previous decade are refined to the point where it is no longer called anti-aging, but rejuvenation. Yes, the aging process can be reversed. In fact, partial rejuvenation of aged laboratory animals was demonstrated as far back as the '60s using a surgical technique called parabiosis in which the aged organisms were connected to young organisms like Siamese twins.

By the year 2020, a majority of individuals are in better physical condition than they were 50 years ago. And every year their life expectancy increases further. Suddenly we are taken aback by the stunning realization that gerontologists are granting us years faster than we can spend them. If this trend continues our lifespan becomes infinite (barring accidents and as yet incurable illnesses).

Realizing this potential, many people with terminal illnesses are turning toward cryonic suspension (a body freezing process fully developed in the '90s), imme-

diately after death, to buy them the required time to reap the benefits of future medical technologies that would cure their ailments, resuscitate them, and turn them loose on a world of immortals.

Despite the accelerating trend toward human immortality, there were still many who resisted on the grounds that this would result in increased population and a strain on the Earth's dwindling resources. The dissenters were loud and influential, but not influential enough to stop the movement. Instead, mandatory birth control measures were enacted, but this created new problems. The drive to procreate was nearly as strong as the drive toward immortality, and it was the opposition of these two psychological factors that gave the space program new impetus after the year 2000.

Land and resources were the precious commodities, and space offered both. Consequently, as we focus on the 21st century, we see large structures leading and lagging the moon in its orbit around the Earth. Each of these autonomous super structures comfortably supports over one million inhabitants. Their feasibility had been determined at the turn of the century when small versions were constructed as temporary homesites for those working on the satellite solar power stations.

Still many preferred solid ground, and with the refined fusion propulsion engines, permanent bases (some evolving into cities) were established on Mars, Titan, and several of the Jovian satellites. Large scale mining operations are in effect along the asteroid belt, with private enterprise accounting for more than half of the activity. The door was open and the way was clear. Humanity was colonizing the Solar System.

Future energy sources: controlled thermonuc- lear fusion; space based solar power . . .

By the year 2030, we look back at the early 21st century and see a revolution in physics as profound as that which occurred

a century earlier when quantum mechanics and relativity were formulated. In the 21st century a refined quantum chromodynamics model of elementary particles greatly enhanced our understanding of the nature of matter, while improved cosmological models altered our views on reality itself. The concepts of space and gravity took on new meanings, the speed of light was no longer an impassible barrier, and many heretofore unexplainable phenomena, including the elusive psychophysical forces, were beginning to yield to the new physics.

New doors to the Universe were opened, and for the first time, scientists are seriously setting their sights on the stars. New forms of propulsion, hardly imaginable only 50 years ago, are being developed, while humanity anxiously awaits the opportunity to extend its domain beyond the cradle of the solar system. The drive is amplified by new discoveries: orbiting telescopes, utilizing thin film mirrors several kilometers in diameter, map out other planetary systems, and radio telescopes on the far side of the moon eavesdrop on an extraterrestrial super culture.

THERE IS so much more to explore, but we don't have the space, so we must now reverse our timeship and return to the present. Nevertheless, what we have seen should be more than enough to clear up the big picture discussed earlier.

Feeling a bit of temporal disorientation, we pause to collect our thoughts, and through our screen, the view of present day 1980 begins to materialize—and so does the big picture.

We are standing on the threshold of, not just one, but many evolutionary events in our development—events so significant that the whole concept of man will have to be redefined. We are living in a rare period in history when we will make the evolutionary transformation from *temporals* to *eternals*, and at precisely the same time we are extending our domain from the finite Earth to the infinite Universe. And in a thousand, a million, or a billion years from now, whether we will have evolved to super organic humanoids, ultra-intelligent machines, or pure energy, we will look back and always remember this period as the golden age—humanity conquered both Space and Time simultaneously. ●

Russians Ahead of Us?

by Walter B. Hendrickson, Jr.

While the Russian invasion of Afghanistan has revived the cold war atmosphere in recent months, the Soviets have been quietly pulling ahead of the United States in another area that was a prime field of competition in the cold war days. This is the field of space exploration in which the Soviets may be as much as ten years ahead of us.

On July 14, 1979, Russian Cosmonauts Vladimir Lyakhov and Valery Ryumin broke the record for long duration space flights aboard the Soviet space station *Salyut 6*. They then went on, for 31 more days in space, setting a new record of 171 days before returning to earth. What's more, the record which Lyakhov and Ryumin broke was a flight of 139 days, 14 hours and 48 minutes set by Cosmonauts Vadmir Kocalyonok and Aleksander Ivanchenkov. This record was also set aboard *Salyut 6* on a flight that lasted from June 15 to November 2, 1978. Also set aboard *Salyut 6* was the record before that. This was done by Cosmonauts Georgi Grechko and Yuri Romanenko who manned the space station for 96 days, from December 16, 1977 to March 16, 1978.

You have to go clear back to 1974 to find a record set by a team of American astronauts. That record was set by the team of astronauts, Gerald P. Carr, Edward G. Ibson, and William R. Pogue, who spent 84 days aboard Skylab. This was the third crew to visit that space station, and the last all-American space mission so far.

The next flight was the Apollo-Soyuz project in which an American Apollo spacecraft, manned by Vince Brandt, Thomas P. Stafford, and Donald K. Slayton, linked up with a Soviet Soyuz, piloted by Alexi Lenov and Valeri Kubason, on July 15, 1975. No records were set by either spacecraft on this mission. The Apollo spent nine days, one hour and 30 minutes in space while the Soyuz spent only five days, 23 hours, and 31 minutes in space.

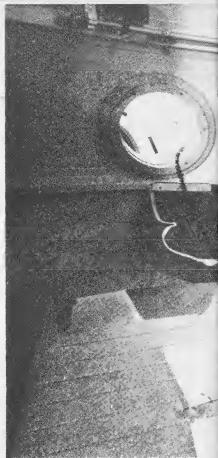
At present, the United States does not have any spacecraft that could match the Russian Salyut for long duration flights. The Space Shuttle, which has to yet make its first flight, can only stay in orbit for up to seven days carrying a European Spacelab in its cargo bay. Most of its missions are planned to be far shorter than that. With some sacrifice in scientific payload, a Space Shuttle and its Spacelab could stay in orbit for up to thirty days.

The stay time for westerners in orbit could be increased for sixty days by making the Spacelab independent of the Space Shuttle so that it could be left in orbit for a time. To do this, a docking port, or ports, and an independent power supply would have to be added to the Spacelab.

It is not the length of the Russian flight that counts, however. It is the way in which these marathon flights were accomplished which is important; that is by resupplying the space station in orbit.

There are two basic types of Salyut space stations labeled the "military" and "scientific" versions by observers. The Soyuz themselves do not mention these labels. Of course, they also say very little about the military Salyut space stations. However, because of the Russian practice of standardizing their spacecraft, the two varieties of Salyuts probably look pretty much alike, at least externally.

The difference between the two types of Salyuts which betray them to observers outside the Soviet Union is their orbits. The military ones carry all military crews



Astronaut Vance D. Brandt, with camera, and Cosmonaut Valeriy N. Kubasov go through a simulation of joint crew second-day activities for the 1975 Apollo-Soyuz Test Project (ASTP) in the Soyuz orbital module mockup at the Johnson Space Center. Kubasov is the Soviet ASTP prime crew engineer. Brandt is the American ASTP prime crew command module pilot.

and orbit closer to earth at about 280 kilometers which is more convenient for earth observation. The scientific ones, however, sometimes carry scientists or cosmonauts from other communist countries and orbit at around 340 miles altitude which is more suited for astronomical observations.

The scientific Salyut space station itself resembles three nesting cylinders stacked one on top of each other with a docking port at each end. The first Salyuts had four solar panels, two at each end, giving the station an H shaped appearance. On later

models these were replaced by three rotatable solar panels on the station's midsection. The largest section of the Salyut, which is four meters wide and four meters long, is a laboratory. The 3-meter-wide and 4-meter long middle section houses controls, and the third section includes the toilet facilities. The docking port on the laboratory end of the station

has a side door so that it can double as an airlock for space extra-vehicular activity.

Altogether, these components make up a space station weighing 18,200 kilograms, and 12 meters long. Originally, the Salyut was designed to accommodate up to four cosmonauts. The crews, however, have been two men with brief visits from other crews on the last two flights, on all

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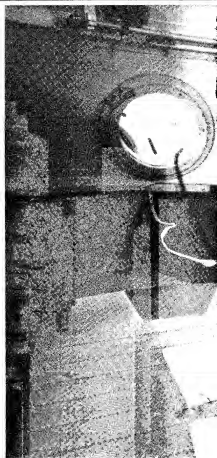
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Photo courtesy of NASA

Astronaut Vance D. Brand, with camera, and Cosmonaut Valeriy N. Kubasov go through a simulation of joint crew second-day activities for the 1975 Appollo-Soyuz Test Project (ASTP) in the Soyuz orbital module mockup at the Johnson Space Center. Kubasov is the Soviet ASTP prime crew engineer. Brand is the American ASTP prime crew command module pilot.

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missions except the first two which were crews of three.

On April 22, 1971, the first crew, Cosmonauts Vladimir A. Shatalov, Aleksei S. Yeliseyev, and Nikolai Rukavishnikov, rendezvoused their Soyuz 10 spacecraft with Salyut 1, which had been launched three days earlier. Some accounts say that they were unable to dock with the Salyut space station while others say that they docked but were unable to board the station. In any event, some malfunction, probably in the hatch of the Soyuz, kept the three cosmonauts from entering the space station. The Soyuz that Shatalov, Yeliseyev and Rukavishnikov were flying was a specially modified ferry craft used in the Salyut program. It lacked the solar panels and supplies needed for a longer independent mission in space. The cosmonauts, therefore, had to return to earth after only five and a half hours in space.

The next crew, Cosmonauts Georgi T. Doborovsky, Vladislav N. Volkov, and Viktor I. Patsayev, were more successful in docking the Salyut 1 on June 6, 1971. They then boarded the space station and spent twenty-three days living and working aboard it before returning to earth June 30. When they undocked, the cosmonauts failed to seal the hatch of their Soyuz properly, and their air supply began leaking out. The cosmonauts did not have any space suits, as no Russians had worn them since 1969, so they suffocated on the way back to Earth.

After this tragedy, no more Soviet manned flights were made for two years and three months. During this time, the Soyuz was extensively modified. Extra oxygen bottles were added, and new space suits were designed for the cosmonauts. These changes left only room enough for two cosmonauts in the Soyuz cabin.

During the hiatus in the Soviet manned space flights, Salyut 1 reentered earth's atmosphere on October 11, 1971. Subsequent Salyut stations have been kept in orbit about a year, and then deliberately dropped back into Earth's atmosphere over the Pacific so that any fragments will fall harmlessly into the ocean.

Meanwhile, the United States was preparing to launch its Skylab which was four times the size of a Salyut.

In a last attempt to top the Americans, the Russians launched two Salyut space stations within a month of each other. Like so many of the Russian attempts to top the United States, these two launchings were disasters. The first space station, Salyut 2, launched April 3, 1973, disintegrated a few days later, and reentered the atmosphere on May 28, 1973. The second of these twin Salyuts seems to have been a dud. It was launched on May 11, 1973, but was never officially given the name Salyut. Instead, it was called Cosmos 557, a catch-all title meaning either an unmanned scientific satellite or military satellite, or a space probe that failed to work.

Three days after this debacle, Skylab was launched, and the Russians quit trying to upstage the Americans in space. Instead, they embarked on an orderly, well financed space station program. This program was interrupted only by a six-day test in preparation for the Apollo-Soyuz flight, which Cosmonauts Anatoly Filipchenko and Nikolai Ruyavishnikov flew from December 2, 1974 to December 8, 1974 and the Apollo-Soyuz mission itself.

Meanwhile, the Russians were gradually catching up with the records for long stays in space. Before the Salyut program resumed, two tests of the remodeled Soyuz were made. Cosmonauts Vasily Lazarev and Oleg Makarov took Soyuz 13 up for a two day flight on September 27, 1973, and cosmonauts Pyotr Klimuk and Valentin Lebedev took Soyuz 13 up for a week long flight on December 18, 1973.

Now, the Salyut program was ready to begin again. Salyut 3 was launched on June 24, 1974, and her first crew, Pavel Popovich and Yuri Artyukhin, docked on July 3, 1974 for a sixteen-day mission. The next crew, Gennady Sarfanov and Lev Demin, were unable to complete their rendezvous and docking with Salyut 3 on August 26, and had to return to earth for a perilous night-time landing.

This setback was recouped on January 11, 1975, by Cosmonauts Alexei Gubarev and Georgi Grechko who docked a Soyuz 17 with Salyut 4, which had been launched on December 26, 1974. They then spent an impressive 29 days aboard the space station. This success was followed by a spectacular failure on April 5, 1975. A Soyuz craft carrying Cosmonauts Vasily Lazarev and Oleg Makarov could not

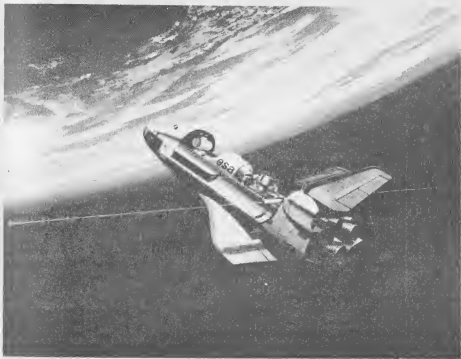


Illustration courtesy of NASA

Space Shuttle with Spacelab. A major planned payload for Space Shuttle will be Spacelab, being developed under the auspices of the European Space Agency, shown tucked safely in the Space Shuttle Orbiter's huge payload bay in this artist's

concept. Shuttle capabilities will make it possible for the world's leading scientists to go into space and perform their experiments and studies, then return to Earth to put the information to use.

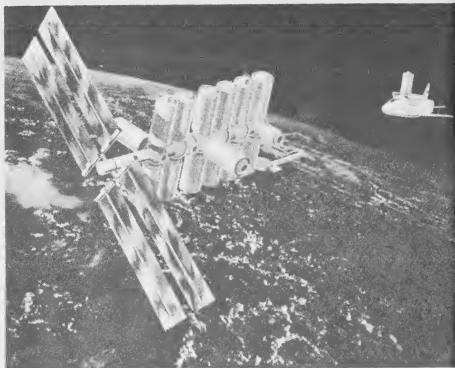
make it into orbit because the upper stage of its booster rocket failed to separate from the spacecraft. The cosmonauts made an emergency landing in the Altai Mountains, and their spacecraft tumbled down a mountainside almost killing them.

The backup crew for this misfire, Cosmonauts Pyotr Klimuk and Vitaly Sevasynov, made the next flight on May 24, 1975. They flew Soyuz 18 up to a docking with Salyut 4 where they spent sixty four days in space.

After the layover for the Apollo-Soyuz mission, the Soviet space station program resumed with Soyuz 20 being launched on November 17 unmanned to dock with

Salyut 4 two days later. This was the first time two unmanned craft had docked in space. More important, however, it was a prototype for the unmanned Progress spacecraft that resupplied the cosmonauts aboard Salyut 6 on their marathon flights. Soyuz 20 transferred fuel to Salyut 4 before returning to Earth, and landing on February 16, 1976.

The Russians' troubles were not over yet by a long shot. In fact, Salyut 5, a military space station, turned out to have a payload of glitches. The first crew to dock with Salyut, Cosmonauts Boris Yolyov and Vitaly Zhobovov, spent fifty days aboard the station, from July 26 to August



Space Shuttle approaching proposed temporary space base, bearing another section to be plugged into the station core. These units could contain outward bound cargo as well as experiments and supplies, making the station both a depot and laboratory. Powered by the four solar panels, the station rotates around its central axis to induce gravity for its occupants. Unlike a space colony, it would hold 20 to 200 people. Such a "construction shack" could provide a base from which production of the large space colony could be supervised. (This scene could also depict a Soviet Kosmolyot approaching the Kosmograd.)

24, 1976. They would have stayed longer, but some problem developed, and they had to make a hasty landing.

The trouble could have been a medical difficulty, or some failure in the space station's air purification system. The latter seems to be most likely judging from the actions of the third crew to be sent up to Salyut 5. The second crew, launched in October 1976, was unable to dock. When the third crew docked on February 2, 1977, the cosmonauts Viktor Gorbalko and Yuri Glaskov, stayed overnight in their Soyuz spacecraft remaining suited

up. They then completely changed the air in the space station before beginning their mission.

This mission lasted only eighteen days before the cosmonauts had to make an emergency return to earth on February 25, 1977. They returned in a raging blizzard at midnight, and their spacecraft was blown into the only lake in the desert recovery zone, Lake Tengiz. After seven hours of bobbing on the lake, the spacecraft and its freezing cosmonauts were finally plucked from the salt waters by a helicopter at dawn.

Salyut 6 got off to a bad start too. The first crew, Cosmonauts Kovalyonok and Ryumin, rammed the docking port at the laboratory end of the space station, considered as the craft's forward end. Fearing that they might have damaged both the docking port on their Soyuz and the one on Salyut 6, the cosmonauts immediately returned to earth.

Because of the suspected damage to the forward docking collar, Soyuz 26 docked at the aft end of Salyut 6. This blocked the docking port that was to be used by the Progress spacecraft that was to resupply Romanenko and Grechko for their record breaking flight. The two cosmonauts, therefore, had to perform a space walk, the first by a cosmonaut since January 16, 1969, to check the forward docking collar.

The space walk proved that the docking collar was undamaged, but the action almost ended in disaster. In an action uncharacteristic of Soviet cosmonauts, Romanenko stood up without authorization from flight controllers. He lost his hold on the hatchway, and drifted free making the horrifying discovery that his safety line was not attached to the Salyut. As the line slipped out, Grechko grabbed its end, and hauled his partner back aboard the spacecraft.

The two cosmonauts then discovered that the indicator showed the valve used to evacuate the air from the airlock was stuck in the open position. Since the men could not space-walk back to Soyuz 26 at the aft end of the space station, it looked as if they were doomed. Flight controllers, however, suggested that it was only the indicator that was stuck, and they should try to pressurize the airlock anyway. This is what they did, allowing them to return safely to the cabin of Salyut 6.

One more step remained. To clear the aft docking port, a second team of cosmonauts flew a Soyuz 27 up to Salyut 6, docking at the forward port in January. After barely pausing to visit and have their pictures taken with Romanenko and Grechko, the new arrivals took Soyuz 26 back to earth, leaving Soyuz 27 for Romanenko and Grechko. This left the aft docking port clear for the 7,000 kilogram Progress 1 to couple up, and deliver its 2,300 kilograms of supplies two days later. The aft docking port was also used later for two more cosmonauts to visit Romanenko and Grechko.

Two cosmonauts also visited Kocalyonok and Ivanchenkov a few days before a Progress tanker brought up supplies for the rest of their 139 day flight. One of Kocalyonok and Ivanchenkov's visitors was a Polish jet pilot participating in the Soviet Union's project of having cosmonauts from eastern block countries fly aboard their spacecraft. This could develop into a truly international program, if cosmonauts from other countries besides the eastern block were included. These could be scientists instead of jet pilots because the Soyuz needs only one pilot.

These foreign cosmonauts could be working aboard even more elaborate space stations than the current Salyuts. According to an article in the December 1978 issue of *Analog*, Soviet space official Sergey Grishin explained in February 1978, "In the future, various docking mechanisms of orbiting stations will be used for dockings by transport ships, and by individual scientific modules outfitted with instruments and equipment . . . Moving into a laboratory which has arrived, cosmonauts will begin special operations without wasting time on transferring equipment. After research is completed, the module may be separated permanently or temporarily, to be replaced by a new one which has arrived from Earth."

Beyond this, the Soviets have plans for a large space station, called Kosmograd (Russian for Space City). This space city would be made up of several modules launched into orbit. A space tug or space crane, called a Kosmobuksir or Kosmokrán, would then herd the modules together, docking them to form the Kosmograd. Several tests of the Kosmobuksir are believed to have already been performed starting with the Cosmos-929 satellite in 1977.

Obviously, the two man Soyuz will not be large enough to serve as a ferry to the Kosmograd, so a bigger spacecraft will be needed. This could be either a five man Soyuz or a Soviet Space Shuttle, called a Kosmolyot. The Russians have already made unmanned tests of both what are suspected to be prototypes of the larger Salyut and the Kosmolyot. What looked like a test of an improved Salyut was launched in mid-1974 as Cosmos 670. What may have been a test of the Kosmolyot escape system came in March 1978.

The exact size and shape that the Kos-

molyot will take is not yet known. Experts believe, however, that it will have two delta winged manned stages like an early version of the Space Shuttle. The first stage would be the booster giving the second stage a boost up to the edge of space before separating and returning to land. Meanwhile, the upper stage will go on into orbit to rendezvous and dock with the Kosmograd.

This second stage orbiter will probably not be an all-purpose space truck like NASA's Space Shuttle. The Progress tankers can take care of the unmanned supply missions. Thus, the Kosmograd will probably be exclusively a passenger ship.

Long duration space missions are not necessary to establish a Kosmograd — unless the Russians are planning a permanent space colony like those proposed by Dr. Gerard K. O'Neil. This means that the Russians may have in mind some space ventures beyond earth orbit, and perhaps even to the moon.

The Soviets were just a few months away from making their own moon landing when Apollo 11 touched down on July 16, 1969. When this happened, the Soviets scrapped their moon landing plans for fear of coming in a poor second, and they insisted they had never really been interested in manned moon flights. Instead, they concentrated on unmanned Lunar flights which landed and returned samples to earth automatically.

These Luna moon landers could be the prototype for a manned Soviet moon lander, now that the heat of the space race is long gone. First, a Salyut space station would be placed in orbit, and staffed by cosmonauts. Then, a lunar lander would be docked with the lunar Salyut. The cosmonauts would take the lander down to the lunar surface, and spend two to six weeks there before returning to the moon orbiting Salyut, and thence to earth.

The Soviets may bypass the moon altogether on their way to Mars. An article in the January 1979 issue of *Astronautics and Aeronautics* quotes Dr. Charles Sheldon of the Library of Congress, whom they describe as, "an attentive student of Soviet Space activity," as saying: "The Russians have an obvious purpose in all this. They want to keep people up for as long as they can before their morale collapses. Tass has stated that the next goal is

a manned flight of six months. And the Russians have stated publicly that the long-term goal of this work is a flight to the planets.

"We don't expect them to go dashing off to Mars tomorrow — it would likely take ten years or more to get to something like that. The uncertain thing in all this is the Soviet space shuttle. How soon will it come along and how addressively will they use it? But they have been doing the sort of things necessary for long-distance flight, like their work on closed environmental cycles. For example, they have reported a successful run of one year of closed cycle capable of supporting a human crew."

A year, however, is less than half the time that it would take for a round trip to Mars using chemically powered rockets. With nuclear rockets the time could be cut down to near the one year period. As yet, though, there are no reports of the Russians testing nuclear powered rockets.

At present, NASA is quietly striving to get its Space Shuttle program off the ground with no mention that it was once part of a grandiose scheme like the ones the Russians now have. This scheme, called Post Apollo Program, would have had a huge Space Base carrying up to 100 people by the end of the '70s. Other six-man space stations, about the size of Skylab, orbiting in higher earth orbit and orbiting the moon, and even a small base on the moon.

Nuclear rockets would ferry astronauts and scientists between the Space Base and moon-orbiting space station. From there, six-man moon landers, called space tugs, would take the men and women down to the moon. By the mid 1980s, six nuclear rockets would be combined into two for interplanetary rockets for a flight to Mars in the mid 1980s.

After the manned moon landing, however, NASA's budget was cut back so severely that the agency was to salvage only the Space Shuttle orbiter out of this plan. Originally, it was to have had a winged booster like that which the Kosmograd is expected to have. This booster, however, had to be dropped in favor of the present solid fueled boosters and external tank. While this less ambitious space shuttle was being developed, the Skylab and Apollo-Soyuz projects were run using boosters and spacecraft left over from the Apollo moon program.

At the same time, NASA was giving up the idea of an ambitious space program, Dr. Gerard O'Neill and his students at Princeton University, began studying the ideas of large colonies in space. This idea caught the public eye in 1975, and has since grown into something of a popular movement. Although not committing themselves to the idea, NASA officials were quick to join up by sponsoring conferences on space colonies.

By the year 2000, O'Neill's concept would have huge space colonies, several kilometers in size, orbiting in the Lagrange points L-4 and L-5 equally distant from the moon and earth. Here, the gravities of the earth, moon and sun balance. These colonies would be built out of ore mined on the moon and catapulted out to waiting ore carriers. The colonies would pay for themselves by building solar power satellites to fill earth's energy needs.

The construction of space colonies and solar power satellites would be an open ended program with one new colony and solar power satellite being produced each year. Ultimately, the materials for this construction would come from the asteroids as well as the moon. Whole asteroids would be pushed back to earth orbit by kilometers-long factory spaceships. These factory ships would smelt the ores out of the asteroids propelling themselves by ejecting the slag from this process.

If the space colony concept originated by O'Neill can be developed into actual hardware, the United States may soon be catching up with Russia again. Then, by the turn of the century, the two nations will be neck and neck again. They will, however, be on different courses with the United States choosing one with more benefits to its people while the Soviets choose one that should provide them with the greatest scientific benefit.

This scenario depends on politics being taken out of the American space program and kept out of its Russian counterpart. This seems improbable because the Russians are already experimenting with space manufacturing.

It is much easier to get the materials needed for this off of the moon which sits at the bottom of a gravity well .16 the depth of earth. Similarly, although Mars is closer than the asteroids, it has a gravity well .39 the depth of earth's while the asteroids have negligible gravity wells. Thus, the

Russians are unlikely to settle for Mars while leaving the moon and the asteroids to the United States. Even if they do, how well could a collectivist society on Mars get along with free-enterprise space colonies mining the moon and asteroids?

One solution to this problem is to renew the Soviet-American cooperation that was begun with the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project. This would have immediate as well as long range benefits. By coincidence, the Soviet Salyut, with its solar panels, would fit inside the cargo bay of a Space Shuttle making it a natural for a cooperative program. Such a program would be advantageous to both the United States and the Soviet Union.

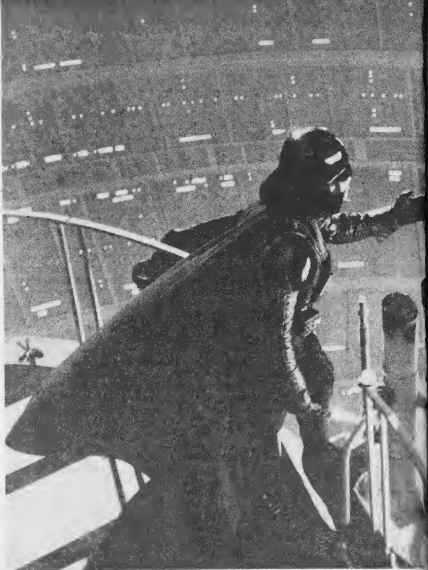
It would give the United States a chance to participate in a free-flying space station program about ten years earlier than they would otherwise. The Russians, meanwhile, would benefit from being able to repair any damage that their Salyuts incurred in docking mishaps or other accidents. Restarting Soviet-American space cooperation, however, will have to wait for the resolution of the current Afganistan crisis.

FILM FOCUS

THE POWERS OF BRILLIANT DARKNESS: "THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK"

Analysis by Steven Dimeo

"IT IS A DARK TIME for the Rebellion." So begins the crawl introducing the long-awaited "Star Wars" sequel, "The Empire Strikes Back," Episode V in George Lucas' projected nonology, three trilogies to be completed by 1991. "Dark time" is



EVIL LORD Darth Vader (David Prowse) gives an unconvincing come-on look to the haggard Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) who has painted himself into a bottomless corner at the end of "The Empire Strikes Back."

putting it mildly for Lucas's endangered species of heroes, Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), Han Solo (Harrison Ford) and Princess Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher), and their equally harassed companions, the towering Wookiee Chewbacca (Peter May-

hew) and the droids C3PO (Anthony Daniels) and R2-D2 (Kenny Baker). It is only Darth Vader, the Dark Lord of Sith (David Prowse aided by the voice of James Earl Jones), who reaps the benefits from this grimness.



Vader, that is, and film audiences. Except for a few quibbles we have about the acting and characterizations, Lucas — in reassembling essentially the same technical as well as dramatic crew from "Star Wars" — has managed to produce entertainment that in cinematic mastery and sheer imaginative energy actually rivals its progenitor. Like the first in anything, "Star Wars" will remain the real breakthrough,

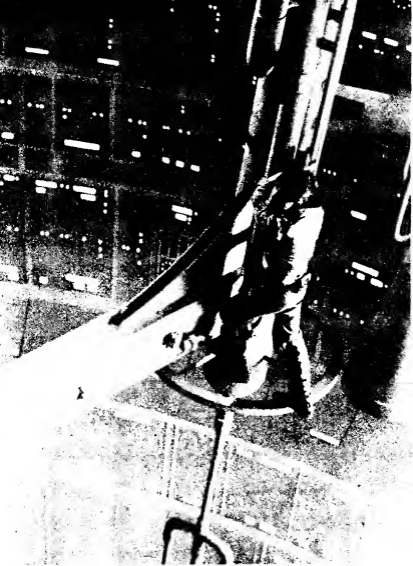
not just for SF film but for the changes it has wrought in the industry and in audiences worldwide where, with a gross far in excess of \$400 million, it will likely hold the record as the all-time moneymaker of the century for some time to come. But "The Empire Strikes Back" — with a budget almost three times the \$10.5 million of "Star Wars" — aspires to be more than just a technologically sophisticated and light-



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hearted update of space and war serials from yesteryear. In its choice of brilliantly original and convincing sets and special effects, new characters like the Hobbit-like Jedi philosopher Yoda, and its more realistic and literate storyline elevating the more monstrous elements of this universe maybe not so far, far away after all, the "Star Wars" saga here takes a dip into the dark night of the soul and threatens to become what it only promised to be the first time: a contemporary myth.

First off, stunning visuals and spectacular sets — this time not just for one but three planets — clearly mark the sequel as darker but more ambitious. In the number of special effects shots alone — 414 vs. 380 — it surpasses Episode IV, but figures as usual cannot adequately convey the differences. Led by Brian Johnson and Richard Edlund — the former known for previous work on such films as "2001" and "The Medusa Touch," the latter already an Oscar winner for "Star Wars" — the special effects team offers us scenes of unbelievable realism and absorbing spectacle that literally lend a different dimension to Lucas' fantasy. One of the most inspired is the opening battle on the ice planet Hoth during one of the coldest winters on record. But there are countless examples equally imposing thanks to the more sophisticated computer synchronization of live action with miniatures and matte paintings and to the industrious combination of numerous talents. Used for the first time here is the half-million-dollar quad printer, a system of four projectors locked into a single print that conveys a realistic, three-dimensional effect, particularly in the sequence where Han takes the *Millennium Falcon* into an asteroid belt to shake the pursuing Imperial Star Destroyers. But the team elsewhere demonstrates an even greater attention to detail than in "Star Wars." Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic, Inc., for instance, took three months just to film Luke Skywalker's tripping one of the Imperial walking tanks, an incident during the ice planet battle that lasts little more than a minute on the screen. Cinematographer Peter Suschitzky ("Valentino," "Lisztomania") assists with inventive camerawork that virtually puts us in the driver's seat when a scouting Rebel snowspeeder skims over the surface of Hoth looking for Han and Luke, or when

the *Falcon* takes us on a harrowing ride just above the crags and crevices of an asteroid. Besides the no-nonsense (if somewhat too clipped) editing from Paul Hirsch and matte paintings like the reactor shaft at the cloud city's core supervised by Peter Ellenshaw (his father's artwork was all that saved Disney's "The Black Hole" from total disaster), what helps make this film so impressive are the incredibly realistic yet imaginative sets for Hoth, the swamp planet Dagobah and the cloud city above the gas planet Bespin by "Star Wars" Oscar-winning art director Norman Reynolds.

Despite the awesomeness of the film's realized fantasies, 57-year-old director Irvin Kershner (whose previous credits range from the Sean Connery comedy "A Fine Madness" to the glossy but silly thriller "The Eyes of Laura Mars" and TV's recent "Raid on Entebbe") has chosen to stress action almost to fault. Countering those who might contend this is Lucas' film even if the "Star Wars" director only supervised the production this time, Kershner insisted in the May 19, 1980 *Newsweek*, "I was the director, this is *my* picture . . . He [Lucas] wrote the story, but he had nothing to do with the design of the picture or the shooting." But while the late SF author and screenwriter Leigh Brackett ("The Big Sleep," "Hatari," etc.) and newcomer Lawrence Kasdan are credited with the screenplay, the story remains Lucas' — only one more episode from the original 200-page script he first wrote for "Star Wars" that, if told in full, will complete the rise and fall of the Empire. And irrespective of the extraordinary display of talents from his technicians, it is George Lucas' vision that prevails. Clearly influenced by his reading books on mythology, fantasy and anthropology during the writing of that first script, it is that vision which has here darkened.

That is most obvious in the way Lucas' eternal triangle of intrepids fares throughout this chapter. "Star Wars" pitted the trio only against the Empire, culminating in Ben Kenobi's light saber duel with Vader and Luke's calling on the Force to destroy the Death Star in the highly contrived final minutes. Here the plot revolves not around the generalized conflict between the Rebels and the Empire, but on Luke's one-on-one battle with Vader himself and his efforts to rejoin his friends Han and



LUKE SKYWALKER (Mork Homill) gallops to an uncertain fate on his hairy snow lizard Tountoun in the ice planet sequence of "The Empire Strikes Back."

Leia — both of which prove futile in whole or in part.

But Lucas obscures that doomed sense of separation and failure from the very outset. Investigating a "meteorite" that is really one of the Empire's Probe Droids, Luke begins the story by wandering away from his Rebel friends when he is abominably snowed by the Wampa Ice Creature. Again contemplating leaving the Rebels, this time for fear of being found by bounty hunters hired by Jabba the Hut whose henchmen almost nailed him in the cantina scene in "Star Wars," Han Solo reconsiders to rescue his friend Luke in the frigid Hothian night. But the Empire has already discovered the Rebels' secret outpost and, despite valiant efforts led by Luke, demolishes the base on Hoth. Han and Leia nar-

rowly escape in the troubled *Falcon*. At the behest of Kenobi's spirit (Alec Guinness does have a reprise cameo here as the monk-like Jedi though an eye operation during the filming threatened his participation), Luke cannot follow but must pilot his X-wing fighter to the swamps of Dagobah. As his new mentor, the 26-inch tall Yoda (with the voice of "Miss Piggy" creator Frank Oz), tries in vain to show Luke the stoic, psychic ways of the Jedi Knights, Luke sees a vision of his friends in peril and rushes — against Yoda's admonishments — to their rescue — and, of course, right into Vader's trap. For unable to escape into hyperspace and after temporarily hiding out in the caves of an asteroid, Han and Leia have sought refuge and repairs at the gas mining city in the clouds

over Bespin where Han's fellow gambler-scoundrel Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams, last seen in "Mahogany" and "Lady Sings the Blues") has become leader. To insure the safety and prosperity of the hovering community, however, Lando has struck up a deal with none other than Darth Vader who thereupon baits Luke by holding Han and Leia hostage. Luke arrives too late to save Han from the carbon-freezing chamber but at last faces Vader who overpowers Luke with a Force of a different color — the staggering revelation that Vader is Luke's father. Having already lost his ground in too many ways, Luke desperately commits himself to the city's axial shaft. In the sabotaged Falcon Lando and Leia manage to pluck him from the vane at the base of the city, and frantically repair the stardrive just in time, but Han is left behind, captive in the carbonite.

From that synopsis, it's clear that Luke in particular does not come off any of those worlds as the hero he was in "Star Wars." Yoda himself suspects Luke is a lost cause. As he complains to Ben Kenobi's spirit, "The boy has no patience. Much anger in him, like his father. All his life he looked away — to the horizon, to the sky, to the future. Never his mind on where he was, on what he was doing. Adventure, excitement. A Jedi craves not these things!" Impatiently he chides Luke later for a lack of confidence: "Always with you it can't be done. Hear you nothing that I say? Try not. Do! Do! Or do not. There is no try." When Yoda, with another sigh of exasperation, finally levitates Luke's fighter ship from the muck, Luke exclaims, "I don't believe it." "That," Yoda nods, "is why you fail." And Luke proves that youthful naivete and impetuosity hold him back when he blunders into Vader's trap. In that enthralling climax at the city's core, Luke is even maimed far more than he was by the ice monster: Vader severs his son's hand with the light saber. Not only does Luke never call on the Force at all this time in the heat of battle, but he reacts in sheer desperation when he consigns himself suicidally to the shaft. Though Luke is saved at the end, his hand bionically restored, his pasty expression is unmistakably worse than what he showed us in the opening shots: the look of one defeated.

Whatever Lucas means to tell us eventually about this darker side of his galaxy, there can be no mistake either that he

does so with the sharpened skills of a literate storyteller who brings to bear not merely a talent for highly focused details consistent with the theme, but also unique and vividly realistic visualizations of a rich and meaningful nightmare.

To begin with, even if "The Empire Strikes Back" cannot as easily stand on its own without Episode VI (to be called "Revenge of the Jedi"), it illustrates a highly focused sense of structure and purpose. In "Star Wars" a series of skirmishes led to the climactic battle against the Death Star. Here the story begins with the grand scale conflict on the ice planet, working instead towards the more specific contest between Luke and Darth Vader. And Vader is an even more intimidating foe this time. In the very second scene with the arch-villain, Vader employs the Force to summarily execute his own Admiral Ozzel (Michael Sheard) for having prematurely alerted the Rebels on Hoth to the presence of the Imperial fleet.

But the very environment Luke must operate in echoes the more cosmic hostility he's up against this time. The sets — planets of ice, swamp and gas — are only the most obvious examples. Likewise emphasizing the shift in tone, creatures that served more as a backdrop in "Star Wars" — remember the skeleton of the sandworm on the dunes of Tatooine? — slither to center stage here. One of the more beneficent is the hairy, kangaroo-like snow lizard, the Tauntaun, an indigenous beast of burden the Rebels resort to since their land speeders haven't been successfully adapted to the freezing temperatures of Hoth. The depiction of this creature, by the way, best exemplifies Lucas' attempt to simulate natural motion by blurring stop-motion photography and minimizing "strobing," the flickering often associated with even the best models by veteran stop-motion "Superdynamation" artist Ray Harryhausen ("20 Million Miles to Earth," "The Golden Voyage of Sinbad," etc.).

The rest of the animals are a bit more inimical. It's self-evident in the case of the gorilla-like Wampa Ice Creature. On the swamp planet, reminding us vaguely of the garbage serpent that nearly drowns Luke in "Star Wars," another aquatic saurian which we never completely see creeps up to the amazingly waterproof R2-D2 and actually devours the droid — in bad taste, as it turns out, for the beast immediately

COMPANIONS IN CRIME OR CONSTANCY, Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams) accompanies Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew) and fellow rogue Han Solo (Harrison Ford) through the corridors of the cloud city above the gas planet Bespin.



disgorges the robot. Slow-moving serpents of a more natural variety always seem to be waiting at the edge of the scenes with Luke on Dagobah, even in the relative sanctuary of Yoda's hut. But Leia and Han also find themselves having to fend off more than human enemies in this episode. When Han lands the *Falcon* inside a large asteroid, he and his passengers are bedeviled by bat-like leeches called Mynocks, then, finding that they have unwittingly found "security" inside the bowels of a giant space slug, barely escape jaws that would make a Great White blanch.

As with the sets and props conceived by surrealist H. R. Giger that helped win "Alien" its well-deserved Oscar for visual effects last year, even the machines in "The Empire" assume an organically monstrous mien. Deliberately reminiscent of the Martian war machines from "War of the Worlds," the Imperial Probe Droid floats over Hoth as a crab-like thing with mechanical tendrils. And easily challenging the awesome presence of the Jawa droid transport in "Star Wars," those giant Imperial walking tanks advance on the Rebels like slow, relentless saurian camels.

In fact, it is not just the deft control over tone as much as it is Lucas' derivative yet remarkably unique images that make "The Empire" all the more wondrous a sequel. While we still have to put up with the Rebel X-wing fighter pilots during the ice planet battle bandying vapid WWII jargon back and forth as they did in the final attack on the Death Star, those sinister walking tanks realized so convincingly in stop motion on the screen more than compensate. The addition of a character like Yoda is as impressive a tribute to Lucas' imagination — or, more accurately, to what can happen when the flames of youthful enthusiasm for comic books and movie serials are fanned by the kind of unrealistic adult opportunities he has had. Although Yoda is quite literally a "little green man from outer space," he becomes a humanly believable fantasy father figure because of such things as his fussy old-man hunger and mannerisms, his syntactically archaic manner of speech, and his convincing animation as both a puppet and mechanized doll thanks to "Star Wars" make-up artist Stuart Freeborn. The cloud city over Bespin may also owe a great deal to the late James Blish's "Cities in Flight" series and

the set itself — a white city of sleek towers against the planet's eternal dawn — more than once recalls the ethereal beauty of Oz. (If you look quickly, you'll even notice Lucas' more hirsute versions of the Munchkins.) And yet a city precisely like this one has never before made it to film, so the vision — from its antiseptic cathedral-high halls to the minatory abyss at the center — becomes pure Lucas. Even suspended animation, a stock SF feature effectively pictured in memorable sequences from films like "Planet of the Apes," "2001" and "Alien," gets a fresh stroke. Once outside the theater we may wonder about the practicality of it, but space travelers from the cloud city are not only frozen but encased in carbonite. Han's descent down the dark, steaming 40-foot carbon freezing chamber (one of the most trying sets built for the film) and his emerging, a grimace etched forever on the black slab, make his torture far more visually innovative and intense than merely dooming him to a misty glass coffin a la *Sleeping Beauty*.

It is just this kind of attention to gloomy realism in the fantasy that also helps Lucas transcend the pleasant superficiality of "Star Wars." The "used" look of such things as the Jawa transport and its battered robots comes much more to the fore — and with good reason, considering the weightier theme. Although it more than makes up for the deficiency when it makes some incredible maneuvers through that storm of asteroids, the *Falcon*, for instance, fails three times to jump to hyperspace. With that detail Lucas enhances both suspense and realism by calling into question the reliability of the heroes' escape vehicle and building properly to the climactic success and audience catharsis the fourth time. Even C3PO doesn't come out of these realities in one piece. At the cloud city he is blown apart by a laser blast from what we later learn (once Chewbacca hooks him up again) was an Imperial stormtrooper. But C3PO spends the last part of the film literally in a jumble, head on backwards, hanging from Chewie's back! Graphic violence, enough to warrant the PG rating, elsewhere adds a grittier sense of realism — whether it is Luke lopping off the ice creature's arm or the head of an image of Darth Vader or having his own hand dismembered in the final confrontation. Earlier Han actually slits open a dead Tauntaun, letting its guts spill out,

meaning to keep Luke warm with its carcass. And as if the sight isn't enough, Han has to add, "I thought they smelled bad on the outside!"

Realism of another sort enters in when painfully human touches undercut the seriousness of what the characters say or do. Sometimes the sarcastic banter of "Star Wars" resurfaces as when Leia tells Han after the *Falcon* fails to engage in stardrive the first time, "Would it help if I got out and pushed?" or when, after Han slugs the traitorous Lando, Leia says, "You certainly have a way with people." But when Luke, assuring Yoda he is qualified to be a Jedi, bangs his head on the hut's low ceiling, the detail intrudes to suggest he may not be good enough after all. Somehow C3PO's humanness is more distracting than humorous, too. Take, for instance, the last-minute scramble to board the *Falcon* at the cloud city spaceport when Chewie keeps clanking C3PO's head on the hatchway. Ill-time comic relief? One thing's for sure: Lucas reminds us all too often this time of our heroes' all too human limitations.

In addition to magnified realism, Lucas also imbues this episode with much greater literary import. The major settings become either ironic or symbolic or both. It's on the ice planet, for example, that Han and Leia begin to warm up to each other. More than that, though, the three planets represent distinct stages in Luke Skywalker's Dantean pilgrimage. From the frozen hell of Hoth — and hell is frozen, remember, in Dante's *Inferno* — Luke rockets upward to the purgatorial swamps of Dagobah where he tries but fails to purge himself of worldly attachments. Luke even says of the world after escaping the mired spaceship, "It's like part of a dream." Significantly, too, it is there that Luke comes face to face with his own inadequacies and fears. In the cave where he thinks he sees Darth Vader — effectively shot in slow motion — he realizes the head of the figure he has decapitated is his own (a skillfully subtle foreshadowing, too, by the way, that he is even closer to his enemy than he knows). From the self-examination of Dagobah, Luke progresses to a heavenly city in the clouds above the fiery gases of Bespin. Ironically undercutting the divine quality, though, Lucas makes a *black* the mayor of the white "dream" city and lets the dark figure of Darth Vader conquer

both the city and Luke in the plainly avenging hole of the carbon freezing chamber and the gaping cavern at the city's axis. Luke's leap from Vader's clutches and from what was supposed to have been a heavenly sanctuary for Leia and Han leaves him dangling maimed and helpless from the upended cross-like vane, expelled from a dubious paradise. The numerous caves throughout this episode may well underline Luke's psychological meanderings and perhaps in the case of Han and Leia's growing love unconsciously image the Freudian implications.

Certainly theme predominates more as well in "The Empire." It isn't just Luke's mythic odyssey towards self-knowledge. It is also the role of loyalty toward others. Our heroes' actions and dilemmas stem from friendship. Han, remember, risks his life to rescue Luke in the beginning. When he believes his friend is dead, Chewie bellows out in despair. Later he nearly strangles Lando whose deception has imperilled Han the most. Then again Luke chooses to save his friends rather than complete his Jedi training. And even Leia, in a scene touching despite its eleventh hour corniness, declares her love for Han just before he gets the shaft of the carbon freezing chamber. What makes the question of loyalty more complex is whether friendship is more important than the Force — and not knowing what Luke will do having learned that he owes family loyalty to his father Vader (as that juxtaposition demonstrates, "Vader" comes even closer to the German word for "father" — "Vater"; we should have suspected!).

However successfully ambitious in moody integrity, imaginative flourishes, realistic touches, symbolic settings and thematic depth, the film fantasy does leave a little to be desired in at least four respects.

For one thing, the movie confirms what we were afraid to conclude too quickly before: Harrison Ford can't act. His roguish blustering and cynical bumbling come off as what they really are: an act. The only time Ford seems sincere is when, giving us a helpless, little-boy look, he descends towards a real version of what he has already shown us as an actor: suspended animation.

Also — especially in the light of the theme of loyalty — C3PO is less a cute,

computerized fussy budget here and more a royal pain in the butt. He is not just a clanking, cantankerous crab; he is, worse, capricious. When he relays the R2-D2's odds against surviving an Imperial attack or computes his own odds when they are faced with a flight through the asteroid belt, the news doesn't exactly buoy his human masters' spirits. Another time when Han and Leia are understandably perturbed at his obvious conclusion that their asteroid asylum is unstable, C3PO can only mutter, "Sometimes I don't understand human behavior." Even that is an understatement. It isn't simply his poor timing when he interrupts Han and Leia during a supposedly tender moment that almost leads to their first kiss. It's his turncoat defeatism. When he recommends they surrender, Han has him disconnected. Later C3PO actually apologizes to Lando who has callously handed them over to Vader, and even doubts and criticizes R2-D2 when the little robot has trouble overriding the central computer and opening the elevator doors to safety. The only common denominator in Lucas' planned nonology will be these robots, but C3PO, with only a fraction of his previous charm, may not be equal to that task.

Furthermore, outside of Luke and Yoda, the other characterizations still seem empty. Producer Gary Kurtz had said in the fall of 1978 that, "having established the main characters, and having gained public acceptance of them, we intend to develop their emotional aspects, their relationships with one another." That ends up here more often as silly sentimentality. Is there any other way to interpret Chewie's crying at his friend Han's plight? What we'd rather have is more information about their past that makes him so devoted to Han. In Leia's case, we have to sit back and watch her falling in love with Han without knowing anything about her emotional make-up that would make her be on the make for someone like him. Although one allusion appears in Donald F. Glut's Ballantine paperback novelization, it seems peculiar that we never even hear her refer to that enormous loss of her loved ones and subjects when the Grand Moff Tarkin (Peter Cushing) obliterated her home planet Alderaan in the last episode. Carrie Fisher's strained anger may compliment Ford's artificiality, but neither can hide the holes in this love affair. For

the time being, Clark Cable and Vivian Leigh are safe from serious competition.

Finally, as other critics have already pointed out, too many loose ends prevent "The Empire" from being a film intrinsically satisfying in itself. Once we catch a quick glimpse of the back of Vader's Dr. Phibes-like head as he slips back on his helmet, evidence of some kind of mishap during his days as a Jedi and yet to be covered in the saga. Yoda also makes a cryptic reference to Kenobi's spirit as Luke leaves Dagobah. "That boy is our last hope," Kenobi laments. "No," says Yoda. "There is another." A character yet to be introduced in the next installment? Then of course Han Solo's fate is literally left up in the air there in the cloud city — and so is what Luke will do when he next faces Vader as his true father.

But neither this lack of resolution nor the dearth in flesh-and-blood characterization can detract from the greater depth and substance George Lucas has given his faraway galaxy this time out in "The Empire Strikes Back." And here we were beginning to think that all outer space and current cinema had in common was a natural vacuum. ●

Fans, Prose & Cons

by Steve Fahnstalk
N.W. 440 Windus St.
Pullman, WA 99163

NUMBER FIVE: HOW CLEAR WAS MY ETHER. . .

Me again. Talking to you, again. I hope your last few months were nice, and that you made it to at least one con. If you did, and if you enjoyed it (or not), I'd like to hear about it. I *know* we barely scratched the surface on cons in my last column; if there's more you'd like to know, let me know.

Let me ask you a question, see if you've been listening. Ready? *What is a fan?* And again: what does a fan do? And: What is a

fan interested in? Even if it seems like covering old ground, let's take another quick look at the subject. I'm going to crib here: a fan is who I mean when I point to someone and say "that's a fan". Got it? There is no single definition of fan—and no definition is more valid (i.e., no fan is "more of a fan") than any other!

A fan is: young/old, male/female, white/non-white, capitalist/socialist/communist/anarchist, etc; a fan is interested in: Star Trek/Star Wars, Asimov/Heinlein/Moorcock/Aldiss/Bradley, Austin/Barr/Whelan/Freas/Kirby/Windsor-Smith, D&D/SCA/Heyer, SF/Fantasy/Sci-Fi/Comics/Comix, sex/sexual roles/sexual politics, Outer Limits/Dr. Who/Lost in Space, "Literary" SF/Space Opera, history/art/criticism/what have you... had enough? We're all fans—what sets us apart is that we get together, we communicate with each other, we seek each other out. And that's wonderful.

Another, minor difference is that we have a common interest that's easy to define as "fandom"—it's what I mean when I point to it and say "SF". It's such diverse things as "Alien" and *Engine Summer*; and includes damn near everything that could possibly be written about. It's not specialized, like philately (yes, I'm a stamp collector) or almost every other reason people have conventions. It's not hierarchical, nor is it linear. The closest thing we have to a hierarchy is the division between "fans" and "pros"—and nobody agrees on who's on top!

So what's my point? Simple: don't look down. Don't point and sneer. I've seen you do it; I've done it myself. I hate myself for it. That 14-year-old with the *Galactica* jacket and blaster—that's YOU. . . several years ago. Before you "learned better" or "grew up", you were just like that—inside. But "they" wouldn't let you do it in public, they'd have laughed at you if you had, right? That young person is luckier than you were, he can play those games out loud. So if you take that away from him, you're no better than "they" (you know, the "mundanes", the schmucks who sneer at your precious SF and call it "that crazy Buck Rogers stuff") were.

Trekkies? Same thing. Ditto any group you look down on. Somewhere some other group is looking down on you. Snobbery in fandom happens. But to the "snobees" it's not a game. It can hurt, and it can

make the recipients turn away from fandom. We've all played the "I know someone/something big and you don't" game on occasion, but sometimes we forget to make sure the other player knows it's a game. You remember: "Well, when I called Harlan the other day, he told me . . ." It can be a sort of a fun one-upmanship. It gives you a feeling of importance; you feel like a mover and a shaker. You know Harlan personally, you're somebody.

I'll tell you a secret: the last time I called Harlan, he said "Who?" Then he cut me dead. No malice, I just wasn't someone he wanted to remember. But I know his phone number, I called Harlan at home. Does that make me someone? Nope. "Someone", to Harlan, is a person who's doing something, not someone who's resting on last year's laurels. Are you resting and name-dropping (or worse), or are you doing something?

If you don't want to write or paint, or whatever, here's something (something big!) you can be doing: when you go to a con, or to a meeting, you can be welcoming someone. Go up to that person in the corner who looks like he doesn't know what it's all about, and talk to him. Take him by the arm and show him around; introduce him to someone else.

Take the initiative. Be someone. Sure, right now, that kid/person is only interested in Lt. Starbuck; but next month, or next year, he'll probably be reading "the good stuff" (whatever you think that is). . . but only if some person cares enough to show him that there's more. I think each of us has a responsibility to do that. Isn't it nice? Idealism lives—in fandom.

DEPARTMENT OF CHANGES, CORRECTIONS, BLOOPERS, ETC.

Mea culpa. In the February issue, I had printed the cover to a "Mainstream"; illo by Steve Stiles. I did not ask permission. Ten people chewed me out at NorWes-Con. Sorry, Steve. If any of you don't want your covers reproduced, *let me know!* Beforehand. (Some people are sooo touchy!)

Dept. of missing thingies: Last issue's column was cut, since I wrote more words than I'm supposed to. Due to lead time, (that's time elapsed between writing and printing) I have no idea *what* was cut. If your zine or con got cut, I'm sorry. I try, really I do.

ZINE & SMALL PRESS LISTINGS:

FANTASY NEWSLETTER, Paul Allen, 1015 W. 36th St., Loveland, Co. 80537; monthly, \$1.50/\$12 for 12 issues. I'm updating this listing, since FN has changed format. It's now printed on good paper, has columns by the likes of Leiber, Sydney Weinberg, Mike Ashley, Jeffrey Elliot; covers by Fabian & Thomas Canty; in fact, this magazine has almost everything which pertains to fantasy publishing. The small press reviews are invaluable. Get it!

NOUMENON, Brian Thurogood, COA (Change of Address): 40 Dorora Rd., Oneroa, Waiheke Island, New Zealand. New Price (US): \$12.25/10 issues (air-surface mail is \$7/10). Everything I said about this zine in November still holds, only more so. Tell him I sent you.

THE COMICS JOURNAL, Fantagraphics, Inc., 938 Stillwater Rd., Stamford, CT. 06902; Quarterly, 12/\$10.50. Since many of us are interested in comics and sf/fantasy graphics, I thought I'd tell you about this zine—and is it a corker! About 140 pages, glossy cover, printed on newsprint; the first 1980 issue has news, reviews, interviews with Trina Robbins and a good one with Harlan (and one with Kelly Freas); an unbelievably good alternate-world review of Adolf Hitler's comic "Stahlmann" (Steelman). Also of interest is:

THE BUYER'S GUIDE; DynaPubs Ent, 15800 Rt. 84 N., E. Moline, IL 61244; weekly; \$8/26. Why I am touting a newspaper that's 905 ads, hey? Because for a collector (and a lot of you are) of anything—this is a must! If you're not interested in comics, you can find ads for: sf books, films, stills, models, original art, records/tapes; anything collectible. Good news/interview columns, too.

THE LOOKING GLASS/STELLAR FANTASY NEWSLETTER; Ben Fulves, 25 Parkway, Montclair NJ. 07042. Quarterly, 40¢/both. SFS membership \$5/yr., includes newsletter & **THRU BLACK HOLES**. Interesting. Very slim zine; notable for lots of fanart (some good, some not.) Nice short article by Linda Bushyager on videotaping. "A" for effort, lesser grade for content.

NEOLOGY, ESFCAS newsletter; Robert Runte; Box 4071, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6E 4S8. Monthly; \$4/yr out-of-town; \$8 in Edmonton (!) An interesting mimeo club newsletter; Robert's trying to make it the newszine for all Canadian fandom. It might be of only marginal interest to non-Canadians. Try a sample at 75¢ and see; I find it interesting (there's that word again?).

TELOS, A Bilateral Review of Substance & Accident; Teresa & Patrick Nielsen Hayden, 5022 9th Ave. NE, Seattle, WA. 98105. Freq. unk.; price unk. Here's another tidbit for you: if you publish a zine, you can usually get other zines in trade for yours. Another way of getting zines is to write a Letter of Comment (LoC) (which must be published for you to get a copy, otherwise you end up in the WAHFs (We Also Heard From), or a contribution. This is known as "the usual". This zine is not "the usual". It's very fannish, very funny. Good 5-page illo section by Rotsler, lotsa other stuff. This is a very nice zine.

One more: "LOOKING FOR KADAK", by Harlan (him again?) Ellison; \$5 plus 50¢ p&h from Hourglass Tapes; PO Box 1291, Garden Grove, CA. 92643. Their newest tape; possibly their best. Harlan reads his story, complete with accents and funny voices. He's an entertaining fellow. You'll laugh yourself sick; I did.

I can't resist one more: **COSTIGAN'S NEEDLE**, by Jerry Sohl; illustrated by George Barr; \$24.95 from New Venture Publishing, PO Box 9028, Moscow, ID. 83843. This classic SF novel is the first in a series of numbered, limited-edition reprints. It has a beautiful color wraparound dj by George Barr, with four tipped-in color plates and a lot of b/w illos. Since I'm 1/3 of the publisher, I won't rave too much—**BUT THIS IS A QUALITY COLLECTIBLE BOOK!!!!** (The publishers wish to thank **AMAZING** for this free plug).

Before I go on to the con listings, I'd like to add a little postscript. I've noticed an alarming tendency lately to send me one or two issues, wait for a review, then drop me from the mailing list. Please don't do that! It makes me feel used. One zine even quoted my review in advertising, then

dropped me. I will be updating listings from time to time; I'd like to keep current on what you're doing, OK? See you next issue. CLEAR ETHER!

CON LISTINGS:

(I must have con listings 4 months in advance, for lead time.)

RIVERCON V; Aug 1-3; \$10 (\$2 riverboat cruise) to Box 8251, Louisville, KY 40208. GOH: Zelazny, FGOH: Lou Tabakow, TM: DiFate. Galt House, \$37 single. 24-hr. con suite, art show, masquerade, Ming awards.

SWANCON 5; Aug 15-18; PO Box 225, Wembley 6014, Western Australia. Price, events unannounced. GOH: Anne McCaffrey. Australian National SF Con.

MICHICON I; Aug. 15-17; \$20 to 1916 Cadillac, Flint, MI 48504; GOH: Ted Sturgeon, Samuel R. Delaney, Boris Vallejo, Alan Dean Foster. I assume it has the usual events.

BAERCON; Aug 15-17; Goltzstrasse 35, D-1000, Berlin 30, Germany. Germany's National SF Con. Would one of you kindly o'seas readers send me a conrep on your cons?

BUBONICON 12; Aug. 22-24; \$10 (\$15 w/banquet) to: ASFS, 429 Graceland SE, Albuquerque, NM 87108. GOH: C.J. Cherryh. Hilton Inn, \$37 single. No further information.

AFiCON; Aug. 22-24; price unk.; to ASFiC, 6045 Summit Wood Dr., Kennesaw, GA 30144. GOH: Ted White, FGOH Mike Glycer, TM: Mike Bishop. Also Boris Vallejo. 18th Annual DeepSouthCon.

NOREASCON II; Aug. 29-Sep. 1; \$45 to Box 46, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139. GOH: Knight & Wilhelm; FGOH: Bruce Pelz; TM: Robert Silverberg. 38th Worldcon. I hope I'll see you all there. This is a must-attend for all who can afford it!

MOSCON II; Sept. 12-14; \$8 to 9/1, \$10 at door; to PO Box 9141, Moscow, ID 83843. Travelodge, \$23 single. GOH: George Barr, Jerry Sohl; FGOH: Frank Denton. Also Alex Schomburg. Jacuzzi

party; art show, usual events. My favorite con (I'm the chairman!).

OTHERCON IV; Sept. 12-14; \$8 to 9/1, \$10 at door; to Box 3933, Aggieland Station, TX 77844. GOH: Jack Chalker. No other info available.

NONCON 3; Oct. 10-12; \$10 to 8/1; \$12 after; to: PO Box 1740, Edmonton, ALTA, Canada, T5J 2P1. GOH: Vonda McIntyre, FGOH: Jim Young. Short story contest, usual events. A good con, and this year's chairman, Randy Reichardt, plays a mean guitar.

OCTOCON III; Oct. 11-12; The Spellbinders, Inc., Box 1824, Santa Rosa, CA 95402. The theme is "Conquest of Space & Time". Author GOH: Theodore Sturgeon. Artist GOH: Don Dixon. Many authors and scientists will attend.

WORLD FANTASY CON: Oct. 31-Nov. 2; \$20 to 9/1, \$25 after. Limited to 750 members. GOH: Jack Vance, Boris Vallejo, MC: Robert Bloch. Memb. to: Chuck Miller, 239 N. 4th St., Columbia, PA 17512. World Fantasy Awards (the "Howards"); other events. The fantasy big 'un.

That does it for this issue. Hope all your cons are good; and remember, I like mail and always try to answer any letters; guaranteed if you enclose an SASE or IRC. Keep reading AMAZING! ●



COME ON, Zortag, everybody's waiting for you."
"Just let me finish the entry for last night's orgy."
"Are you trying to put me off, Zortag?" Holly Baset cooed creamily. She shook her head so her hair would jingle — it was golden hair that hung to the middle of her back — real gold. She had killed people who had grabbed for it. "Come on, Zortaggy. Are you still depressed over that silly Zenna Cowanna?"

Zortag Gollarios shrugged minutely and kept tapping out numbers and names on the keyboard. The screen in front of him lit up with bright blue-white entries. At the top of the screen were the words *COPULATION REGISTER* and below that, in smaller print, were column headings for name, act designation, active/passive, partner(s), accessories, and endurance. Zortag filled in each space carefully, according to the notes on a scrap of paper next to the keyboard.

the Amorphobe

Illustrated by Stephen F. Schwartz

by Wayne Wightman



"I knew that Zenna was unstable," Holly Baset murmured in his ear. She had moved behind him now, and she let her hands and arms ooze down his chest. Then she dragged them back up to his shoulders, rumpling his shirt but it took more than that to arouse him. "She's perfectly happy back there in the brig, I'm sure. She has everything she needs. She doesn't have what she *wants*, of course, which is you. But she's happy." Holly leaned over him. Her hair brushed against the sides of his face. It smelled like strangely perfumed metal.

"I'm almost finished," he mumbled. "I'll be right in."

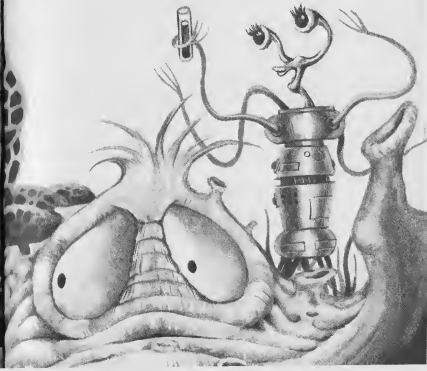
"You'd better hurry," she said. "It wouldn't look good on your record if you started missing orgies after we put Zenna in the brig. Someone might get the idea that you were in love with her. Bad enough she was in love with you. But if you were in love —"

"She meant nothing to me," Zortag said offhandedly. Her hair was tickling his left ear — there seemed to be some kind of static charge in it. "If I don't finish this now, I'll forget what my notes meant. Zenna was a loser. Too emotional." His voice was sharp.

"Don't get cranky, Zortaggy. I know you wouldn't endanger the stability of the ship's crew by getting involved with someone. I was just kidding." She pressed herself closer to him and let her heavy breasts rest on his shoulders. Thanks to the Gomez Sexual Enhancement Implant Systems, her breasts, among other things, grew larger as her libido became more stimulated.

"You're making it hard for me to think, Holly."

"Think of something closer to my heart," she whispered, her lips brushing against his ear.



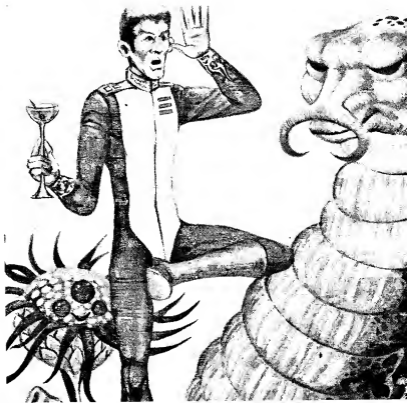
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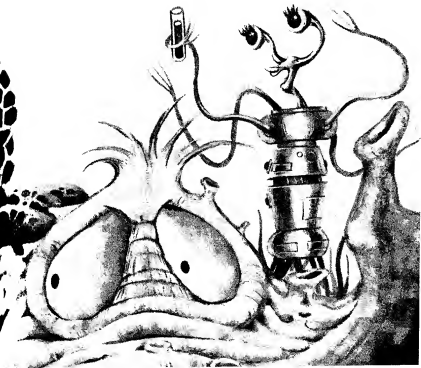
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"I will — soon as I finish. Just five more entries."

"Well, hurry. I'll leave your GloSex spansule here. Maybe you should take it now so that when you finish this you'll be . . . ready." She placed the black and yellow capsule on top of his notes. "I took mine a few minutes ago and . . ." (Her voice dropped an octave.) ". . . it's already working." She unwrapped her arms from his shoulders. "I have to go in with the others now, Zortaggy. If I'm busy when you get there, you just cut in, will you?"

"Yes." Four entries to go. "I'll cut in, Holly," he said patiently.

"I'll erase whatever little guilt feelings you have about that poor unbalanced Zenna Cowanna. Imagine, confusing love and sex like that." She stood in the half-opened hatch. "You can be sure, Zortaggy, that Holly Baset won't make that mistake."

"I'm sure." Three entries left.

"Just good clean fun. Don't be long now."

Zortag heard her gold hair rustle against the hatch frame as she left his compartment. The hatch sealed behind her.

Zortag finished the ledger work and then stared at the screen. Across from Zenna Cowanna's name was only empty space. This would be her last trip out with a Reconnaissance Crew. "Personal instability," would be the charge, specified with "Emotional involvement with crew member." And he, Zortag, would undoubtedly have to give a deposition.

He didn't even like Zenna Cowanna, a skinny, wispy little thing. The trouble had begun a month or so ago when she'd refused to let Lauren Innerxenos cut in during the pre-sleep orgy.

"Oh well," Zortag thought as he picked up the yellow and black GloSex spansule. He was staring at it when it happened. He never did find out exactly what it was, but there was no doubt that it was very bad. He was knocked out of his formchair and slammed his forehead into the top edge of the screen. A fraction of a second before he hit it, he noticed that the screen was blank — the power was off everywhere, in fact, and as he lurched through the blackness of his compartment, knowing somehow that he was on his way to cracking open his head, he wondered if this momentary lucidity meant that he was about to die. "Oh crap," he thought.

ALL THINGS considered, Zortag Gollarios found it quite surprising that he was still alive. Life was cheap in Recon Crews, and he knew that his life was considered a little cheaper than most others. He was only the Cultural Recorder and wasn't in the Geologic Resource Division or in Psionic Development or Technological Cataloging. Those people were important — and those people were in the adjoining compartment, floating around at absolute zero and fully decompressed.

Zortag disconnected his helmet from the neck of the suit and popped it off. After he'd pulled himself out of the rest of the thing, he slouched in his formchair and tried to clear his mind. The chair slowly changed shape to fit his body.

Those faces hung in his mind. Georg Pilomian and all his muscles and his carefully waxed moustache . . . Holly Baset's sprayed-out spun-gold hair and her amazing lips and encyclopedic memory . . . Lauren Innerxenos' strangely double-jointed body . . . Corliet Zim, whose heavy gaze and heavier psi-bursts had been known to make lesser species comatose . . . and the others — all back there, all bloated into bizarre lumpy shapes, bruised-looking, all with crystallized blood around their eyes like delicate sprays of darkened quartz.

Zortag shivered.

But there he was — underweight, homely, muscles atrophied by weightlessness and his aversion to exercise, and alive. And alone, as far as he knew. Technicians were forever scurrying through the bowels of the *Ganzak* checking this pressure or that cooling device, and some of them could still be alive. Zenna Cowanna might still be breathing back there somewhere. But if he was not alone, it would make no difference.

Whatever had ripped away three or four square meters of the *Ganzak's* hull had also twisted and jammed the hatch that would let Zortag inspect the rest of the ship. So. He was stuck in his compartment and had access to the adjacent closet which was filled with unofficial cargo: Georg Pilomian's stash of moustache wax, Zim's stamp collection, and assorted odd prosthetics which Lauren Innerxenos attached to her overly twistable body during the orgies. Zortag closed the door of the closet and sat down at the keyboard.

He asked the ship to tell him how badly it was damaged.

SPECIAL MESSAGE, the screen replied. Then, in a burst of activity it printed out the following:

DEAR FRIEND, NORMALLY WHEN WE FEED IN RESPONSES TO THIS THING, WE TRY TO MAKE THEM SOUND AUTHORITATIVE AND OFFICIAL. YOU KNOW, LIKE LEAVING OUT THE "THE'S". BUT WHEN CERTAIN CONDITIONS HAVE BEEN MET (AND IF YOU'RE READING THIS, THE CONDITIONS HAVE BEEN MET), WE HERE AT THE LORPAG PROGRAMMING OFFICE DECIDED TO INSERT THIS MORE PERSONAL SOUNDING MESSAGE.

FRIEND, YOU ARE DORKED. GUIDANCE ON THIS THING IS NOW HOPELESS. YOU ARE RIDING A GARBAGE CAN TO NOWHERE. WELL, LET'S NOT BE TOO HARD AND FAST ABOUT THAT. IF YOU ARE GOING SOMEWHERE, YOU WILL IMPACT AT YOUR PRESENT VELOCITY, AND THEN YOU WILL BE NOWHERE.

WE DOWN HERE AT LORPAG SEND YOU OUR SYMPATHY, BUT ACCORDING TO OUR CALCULATIONS AND UNOFFICIAL WAGERING, IF YOU'RE READING THIS, YOU HAVEN'T GOT THE CHANCE OF A RAT'S ASS IN A CATHOUSE.

WELL, WE'RE OFF TO LUNCH NOW AND ARE WE GLAD WE'RE NOT YOU. UPCOMING IS AN INDEX OF STUFF ABOUT YOUR PARTICULAR SHIP THAT PROBABLY WON'T DO YOU ANY GOOD, BUT MIGHT HELP YOU PASS THE TIME.

(SIGNED:) FINGT REDDERSOHN, BENNY MORST, & KLERM "COFFER" BROWN.

Jesus, Zortag thought. The index started rolling up the screen. Zortag told it to hold, and then asked the computer how far they were from their destination, 9F-3308c.

127 HOURS 41 MINUTES, it answered.

Zortag wished he had some nervous habits he could engage in, but all he could think of doing was to sit there and sweat and twitch every once in a while. Finally he decided to take another look at the index. Maybe it would calm him a little.

IT DID more than that. He found out by studying maps of the *Ganzak* that by prying off the air-exhaust grille in his compartment he could do as the scurrying technicians did and crawl through the ventilation system and come out in the

number twelve lifeboat. And if he didn't dally too long, there was an outside chance he could decelerate enough to go into orbit around 9F-3308c. The planet was hospitable enough. The air was good and he had had all his immunizations . . . It was where they had been supposed to go anyway. Maybe in a couple of years someone would realize they hadn't come back. And maybe a rescue party would come. Maybe. Ha.

Zortag couldn't pry off the grille, so he used his helmet to smash it in. Crawling in the dark was not nice. He kept putting his hands into puddles of something slimy. Mold? Algae that had grown in the condensation? Or had the technicians . . . ? He hurried on.

The lifeboat was, as he remembered from his initial inspection of the *Ganzak*, substandard and miniscule. Someone had used it for a picnic, apparently. No doubt it was the technicians. Pieces of food and empty juice containers floated aimlessly in the compartment, thumping against this or that piece of equipment and then ricocheting lazily back across in front of his face.

Only after setting the computer for 9F-3308c and separating from the *Ganzak* did he become suspicious of all the flattened food tubes and crumbs that he had to keep swatting away from his face. He checked the food supply and found two balloons of water and one of Lauren Innerxenos' latex body attachments. This one apparently hooked up around her shoulders . . . but with Lauren's body, one could never be sure. He held it in front of his face and stared at it dully.

Zortag sighed. He would miss the food more than he would miss Lauren's convolutions.

Zortag had started out as scrawny. But by the time the lander went into a smooth glide down to the habitable surface of 9F-3308c, he had passed beyond scrawny and had moved into the realm of attenuated emaciation. In vain search of nourishment, he had eaten his fingernails down to the quick and had several times considered a swift surgical removal and a slower cannibalization of his toes — but then his mind cleared, or lapsed into a murky delirium, and he never went through with it.

After the retros had finished their screaming and after the last wobble had subsided in the lander's legs, Zortag took five deep breaths and gathered his remaining strength. The residents of the planet, according to preliminary reports, were marginally humanoid and without overt xenophobia — but that, he knew all too well, was no protection against being considered anatomically very interesting and being carefully dissected; or against being considered a savior who should immediately be sent into the afterlife with important messages for dead pets and relatives. Zortag gritted his teeth and pulled himself erect. Whatever awaited him out there could be avoided only so long. Besides, he was on the brink of starvation. He shoved open the hatch.

At the foot of the lander, the alien stared up at him with incredulous ash-blue eyes.

Now Zortag Gollarios has seen slimy aliens that oozed through swamps so putrid that he had decided on the spot to give up his position as Cultural Recorder and go into something more mechanical like Planetary Sterilization. And he had seen aliens, low flattened things, that lived in hurricane-swept deserts and took their nourishment from the air. He had seen things too ugly to possess life — but did; and they had lived in places as different from each other as hair is from liver. So when this glumpish marginally-humanoid alien pushed back its straw hat and shaded its eyes with one multi-jointed arm and said,

"I hope you know you just scorched the hell out of my marigolds,"

Zortag had to cough to keep from swallowing his tongue.

The alien stood down there at the foot of the lander and stared silently up at him. "Well?" it finally said.

Zortag felt his knees turn to paste. He never knew when his head hit the pliant edge of the formchair.

He had dreams of looking into the eyes of a stump — a stump that had had its top whittled into a rough roundness. It had bark like melted putty, and ash-blue eyes with a twiggy overgrowth like eyebrows. And once he had awakened momentarily — he couldn't tell if it was dark or if he just couldn't open his eyes — and he had had the oddest headache. Rather it was more like a headtickle. Even in his giddiness he knew it was utterly impossible to have butterflies in his head, but it sure felt like some silent little skittery thing was skimming across the hills and dales of his cortex, sticking its hair-coil tongue into this fissure and that furrow.

When, at last, he opened his eyes, he was alone in a room — a bedroom — and he lay in a tangle of white sheets and a plaid blanket. It seemed to be morning, and through white lace curtains the sun cascaded onto the hardwood floor in a brilliant swath of light and dark curlicues. He propped himself up on his elbows. His stomach didn't hurt anymore either. After moving his tongue around his mouth a few times and smacking his lips, he decided he wasn't in the least hungry, and a quick check revealed a small red dot in the crease of his arm — probably where he had been fed. But by whom? The alien?

She stood in the doorway, tall, slender, and utterly beautiful. Without a word she came closer and he began to realize that she was no ordinary woman. She had the normal number of eyes and ears for a human being, and they were all in the right places, but there was a difference. Her skin was smooth as plastic and seemed to glow softly, even in the bright light of morning. And there were other things. Although she was perhaps 32 or 33, she had none of the marks that went with that age, not at the corners of her eyes, not across her forehead, nor did she have that loosening softness of skin that goes with age. And her eyes were just a little too far apart, but he had seen such eyes in human women. Her hands, which hung by her curving thighs, had long and slender fingers that, like her face, were unmarked by wrinkles.

"Good morning," she said as she sat on the edge of the bed.

Zortag studied her carefully. She was not the kind of woman seen in the nudie-vids where one's libido immediately said "Yes!" She was too smooth, too casual, too assured for that kind of nervousness. Nonetheless, Zortag's libido tossed up images of what she might look like with her green wrap-around unwrapped.

"How are you feeling?" she asked. "You were dreadfully undernourished." She smiled. "My name is Winnifred." She offered her hand.

"I'm Zortag Gollarios." They shook hands. "I'm also a little confused."

"All in good time," she said. "Now. What would you like?"

"I'd like to know where I am."

"You're in my home — but that's obvious. You probably want to know what planet you're on. We call this Earth, a planet of the Sun."

"Zortag's head involuntarily twisted to one side and his face contorted into a mask of near-painful puzzlement. "Am I back where I started from?"

"I sincerely doubt it," she said. "Let me guess — our planets have the same name. We both call our homes 'Earth.'"

He nodded. "Are you . . . speaking English?"

"Yes," she said. "Are you?"

He nodded again and fell back on his pillow. "I think I'm still unconscious."

"You were, but you aren't now. I can understand your confusion," she said, patting his hand. "But things will all come clear in good time."

"I don't understand any of this," he said weakly.

Winnifred slipped an arm behind his neck and pulled him half upright, fluffing and stacking the pillows with the other hand.

"Now," she said. "We need to talk a little. First of all, there's the matter of that thing you dropped out of the sky in. It's in the middle of my yard." Her eyebrows rose several millimeters. "I realize that you probably had little control over where it came down, but I do want it out of my yard as soon as you're able to get up and about. I'd like for you to help me reset the marigolds too. You didn't do my apricot tree any good either, but I can live with that."

"You want me to dismantle the lander?" he asked. He hoped that if he said the words himself, there might be a little more reality to the request. There wasn't.

"Yes. That's what you can do for me. What can I do for you?"

"I was supposed to . . . My crew . . ." Zortag concentrated his thoughts. He probably was on 9F-3308c. And his colleagues were probably dead. In all likelihood he would be on 9F-3308c for a good many years. Record-keeping was so bad, it might be ten or fifteen years before anyone ever noticed that the *Ganzak* had never checked back in. So Zortag was on his own and could do just about anything he liked . . . And this alien was asking him what she could do for him.

"My crew," he began, "was supposed to explore and report on your world, but we had an accident and they're all dead. I was the Cultural Recorder. All my life I've been trained to look at things and make notes about them. So I suppose while I'm here I'd like to do my job. Look at things. Make notes. I'm very good at it. I like to watch things."

"What about love?" she asked, placing her hand on his forearm.

"You must be kidding." Zortag pulled his arm away. Then: "Sorry. I forgot for a second — you look so human. You aliens like different things. Look: I just want to do my job here. I like my job." He lowered the sheet a little. "I do like sex though. All of my people like sex."

"But what about love?" she asked.

"What about it? If you want love, you better find yourself a pervert. That's not my style."

"Is it because I'm not from your world?" She laid one hand atop the other and sat a little more erect than she had a moment before.

"No, it isn't that. There is a Section Five, Detail One of the Reconnaissance Code that says that emotional involvement with aliens is —"

"Excuse me for interrupting," she said, "but do keep in mind that you're the alien."

"Uh . . . yes. Pardon me. It says that emotional involvement with, um . . ."

"Human beings," she prompted. "We call ourselves human beings."

". . . with human beings means expulsion from the service and a partial memory wipe."

She smiled and leaned forward a little. "You aren't really in anyone's employ now though, are you? And I find you immensely attractive." Her voice lowered slightly. "There's more of you I desire than the touch of your body against me."

When I first saw you, I wanted you to love me. Can you understand that?"

"Was that you I saw at the foot of the lander? I wasn't seeing too clearly, but you looked . . . different."

"You were weak. Barely conscious." She stood up. "Let me bring you some solid food. Coffee?"

"Yes. Coffee? You have coffee here?"

"For you, my love, there is anything you want."

"Excuse me?" he said. "I won't call you an alien if you won't call me your 'love.' I just have sex with people, I don't love them."

"As you want." She pressed her lips together, turned and left the room.

"Cripes," he thought. "An amoromaniac."

"I'LL MAKE you a deal," she said to him, that glimmer of impending laughter at her lips. "As you dismantle the lander, I'll teach you the social obligations of our society." She offered him another serving of a sweet, orange vegetable.

Zortag refused. He filled up rapidly since his near-starvation. In the dinner's candle-light, her face looked more perfect, more unreal than it did during the day.

"What social obligations?" he asked, wiping his mouth and leaning back.

"You see how you've been eating?"

He shrugged. He ate as he usually ate. As he had always eaten. "So?"

"In the last few minutes I've counted eight faux-pas you've made, any one of which would cause one of our citizens to shun you utterly."

"Me? I did?" Zortag looked at his upturned hands, as though demonstrating to himself that they were not covered with blood.

"And you certainly can't study our culture if no one will have anything to do with you."

"No . . . I guess not." This admission depressed him mightily. She had convinced him now that he needed her. This he did not like.

"So," she said, her lips doing that half-smile again, "you dismantle the lander and help me replant the marigolds, and I'll teach you how to eat and talk without disgusting people."

Zortag nodded. "It's a deal."

"You can begin tomorrow."

"Right."

"Now," she said freshly, "what shall we do with the rest of our evening?"

"I think I'm strong enough for sex," Zortag said. "By the way, do you have anything like paper and a pencil or a pen?"

Her eyes glowed. "Yes, paper, pens, whatever you like. Why?"

"Well, I probably should make notes on our sexual activity."

She gazed at him a moment. "I'm in love with you, Zortag. I want you to be in love with me." She twisted in her chair a little.

"It won't happen," he said. "You're different. You're an alien. Sorry — okay, I'm the alien. One of us is different, anyway. Besides, I've got a job to do here and I need a clear head. If I get irrational, what good will my being here do anyone? I'm just a little guy who wants to do his job right. Regulations say I don't get emotional about that kind of thing." He looked at her, trying to see how she was taking it, but her face showed nothing. "Sex is allowed."

"Well then." She stood up and walked past him to the bedroom door. "Come with me."

"I need some paper and a pen."

"It will be beside the bed by the time you get there."

Zortag chuckled. Maybe, he thought, she would be easier to get along with than he'd originally thought. One just had to be clear and forthright, he realized. One just had to get his thoughts lined up and his priorities in order — confusion, Zortag realized once again with perfect clarity, was a terrible thing.

He rose and walked with measured strides into the woman's bedroom.

EVEN BEFORE he opened his eyes, before he could get more than half his thoughts in one place at one time, he knew he was going to hurt. He knew he would probably feel like he had been beaten with sharp-edged boards. Zortag opened his eyes. The eyelids seemed to push heavy fluid-filled bags from over his eyes.

"Get out of bed!" she said from the doorway. "You have much work to do. I've brought tools for you."

Zortag moved his eyes so that she was centered in his field of vision. Yes, that hurt.

"What did you do to me?" The corners of his lips cracked when he spoke and his jaw was so stiff he couldn't move his teeth apart.

"You wanted sex, I gave you what you wanted. Look, the sun's up already. It's a warm day. If you need breakfast before you start, I can fix you something."

"I need . . ." He tried to sit up, but to do that, he had to tense his stomach muscles — they felt like bruises, like big purple bruises. "I hurt." He lay back and closed his eyes.

Winnifred stepped over to the bed and threw off the sheet and blanket. "No you don't," she said. "You wanted sex, you got sex. I wanted love, I got sex. Now if you were someone who loved me, I would let you lie there till noon. But you're not that person, so at least you're going to get that ugly thing out of my yard. Up!" She slapped his bare stomach.

"Ail!" He curled up in pain. She slapped his legs. "You're killing me! Quit!"

She leaned forward, her lips nearly brushing his ear. "That isn't what you said last night, dear. Up!"

Zortag slowly twisted his body around and then pushed himself upright. He sat hunched over on the edge of the bed like a patient creeping over the boundary of preconsciousness. He nodded. Even that hurt. "All right," he said. "All right."

ZORTAG PUT down the wirecutter and pulled the secondary fuel pump loose. He did not especially like cutting the lander into carryable pieces — it was his only connection to Earth, although it was a symbolic connection, he realized. There was probably enough fuel left in its tanks to lift it three or four meters into the air — then it would sputter and accede to the force of gravity. So it was of no practical value. Zortag carried the pump to the hatch and dropped it to the lawn.

Winnifred came out of the shade of the patio and picked it up.

"Can't you at least tell me how old you are?" he asked as she lifted the thing.

"Sorry," she said as she smiled, her teeth brilliant in the sunlight.

"But why?"

"Same reason I have for not answering your last six questions. If you were to love me, you would find out everything — all of your questions would be taken care of. But since you don't, you'll have to find your answers out there." She tilted her head toward the street and the other houses.

Zortag pulled his head back inside the lander and began undoing the screws on the computer faceplate. He knew when he dropped these freed pieces to the lawn outside the hatch, Winnifred would be there waiting, ready to carry them out to the front of her house where, Zortag presumed, someone would come in the night and carry them away.

Nothing ever seemed to happen during the day. From his vantage point atop the lander, he had earlier surveyed the neighborhood. It was a typical Earth-like neighborhood with houses, yards, patios, a few swimming pools, and many shrubs and trees, some recognizable, some not. There was one odd thing, aside from his never seeing anyone out and around: either the yards were utterly immaculate, not a leaf out of place (like Winnifred's, before his lander charred things up a bit), or the yards were tangled masses of wild, untended growth, the green interwoven with yellow-leafed, strangling shrubbery. The yard next door was of that type — jungular, conceivably hiding any number of aliens who made note of his every movement.

"How come your neighbor's yard is such a mess?" he asked as he dropped the computer faceplate to the ground.

"My neighbor is occupied with things more enjoyable than tending her garden."

"Like what?"

"Do you love me?" She gave him that smile again. He wondered if he would ever know what she knew.

"No, I don't." He ducked back inside the lander.

Zortag worked viciously at the computer, ripping wires loose at their connections and prying the console out with a crowbar. He threw it down in the dirt.

"You're angry," she said. "Why don't you just fall in love with me — then everything would open up to you, you'd understand what you wanted to understand, and the rest wouldn't matter." She looked so harmless and helpful, standing there in the sun in her print dress and straw hat, looking up at him and shading her eyes with one long, slender arm.

It was the harmlessness and helpfulness that caused Zortag to turn back into the half-demolished compartment of the lander and kick the formchair into a cringing quivering glump of putty.

"Damn it!" he yelled down at her, "I don't want to be in love with you — I don't feel like it. And if I were to be in love with someone or something —" (he thought that might give her pause) — "I wouldn't fall into it, I'd move into it with an appropriate and deliberate speed."

She was shaking her head.

"Hell, damn it. You make me crazy!" he screamed at her. "Why can't I just take my notes and be left alone? If you want to copulate, I can copulate — just leave my mind alone! That's private. You understand privacy?"

She was shaking her head again. He kicked the formchair till his shoe came apart. He ripped it off his foot and stomped it with the good shoe until he couldn't see anymore. Had his anger blinded him? His face was wet. Was he bleeding? No, it wasn't blood. Zortag didn't understand this at all. Not at all.

"ALL RIGHT," he said, opening his papers to a blank sheet. "Teach me." He poised the pencil, ready to take careful notes. "I want to know the appropriate gestures, greetings, introductions, facial expressions, topics of conversations, et cetera."

"Why?"

"I want to get out of here. I want to meet other people."

She raised her eyebrows a millimeter and nodded.

"I want to know how come we're both speaking English and why this place is so much like Earth."

"This is Earth."

"But not the one I came from."

"And I can't be held responsible for the language I speak," she said. "What does 'English' mean in your language?"

"It doesn't mean anything — it's just the name of what I speak."

"In my language 'English' translates as 'the language I speak'." She smiled.

Zortag felt his heart beating in his neck and up behind his ears. "Why do you do this to me?" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Why can't you just give me an answer once in a while? Why can't you do that? Wouldn't that be easier than all these evasions?"

She sat at the table across from him. She leaned over his papers. "Zortag, my dear, listen to me: this is very important. Of my own free will, I love you deeply, but I owe you nothing. You are the observer, the one who wants answers. You want but you won't give anything. There is only one way you will ever begin to understand where you are, what you're doing here, or where your future is taking you. There is only one way you will learn that this is not a baroque variation of your dream of hell." She paused.

"I'm listening."

"You'll have to do more than that."

"Like what?"

"Like love me."

"I should have known it. I should have guessed." He put down the pencil and folded the papers shut. "You aren't going to tell me anything."

"I'm telling you everything. Listening and understanding are different. I suspect you're a very good listener."

"Feel free to try me — anytime." He picked up the pencil again and looked ready to take notes on anything she might say.

"You want to know how to be socially acceptable."

"Exactly. I want to get out of here."

"You want to go out in the city and be unnoticeable — so you can take notes on our behavior, in case one of your people is sent to retrieve you."

"You got it. Observation is my job. Observation and recording. I don't get involved — that changes the perspective of the observer. He has to remain detached. He writes down what he sees."

"He observes and records," she repeated. "Is he supposed to understand anything?"

"He does his best," Zortag replied stonily.

"Well then," Winnifred said, "I should get on with teaching you what you need to know." She touched two fingers to her lower lip. "Zortag, I need your final word about something. You aren't going to try to love me?"

"No. That's my final word."

"Then that's out of the way," she said brightly. Surprisingly brightly.

"It was never a consideration," he said.

"I should have known." She made that helpful, harmless smile again.

But she taught him. She taught him how to be received when he was a guest. He took copious notes. He learned how to hold his hands when speaking and what gestures reinforced what statements. Learning to eat was very complex.

The implements were quite similar to those he was accustomed to using, but the manner of usage was entirely foreign to him. Zortag wrote it all down. Sometimes he read his notes back to her and questioned her on points that puzzled him.

Meanwhile the lander slowly was dismantled and the parts stacked curbside in front of Winnifred's house. Every morning they were gone. When he asked who had taken them, she wondered aloud why in the world he would concern himself with such small details.

"In my work, I've learned that the world is nothing but an accumulation of small details."

"Do many people of your kind die of congestion?" she asked cryptically.

"What do you mean by that?" Zortag's eyes narrowed.

"The garbage man takes the parts away," she said distinctly, enunciating every word through pursed lips, as though she wanted to kiss him.

Zortag made a note about the garbage collection.

She taught him about compliments. Compliments were quite different from what he was accustomed to — sometimes they should be enormously elaborate, other times they should be carefully understated.

And the rest of it — it took weeks. Seating arrangements were ironclad. Often there would be chairs, he was told, but frequently they were not to be used, depending on other complex formalities. Zortag even had to learn different ways of walking. Certain walks suggested certain attitudes; other walks should never be done outside one's home. Voice modulation was the same. Some things had to be spoken in higher registers than others. And laughter — this could either ruin everything or he could literally charm the skin off a snake with a certain kind of laugh at the right moment. Zortag filled reams of paper with notes. At night he studied them and during breaks from taking apart the lander, he would practice laughs or walks or compliments or table manners with Winnifred there to watch and correct him.

She always smiled.

SOMETHING SHOULD be said about the way Zortag spent his evenings when his studies were concluded. He would go to the room Winnifred had prepared for him, pull back the covers, climb in, and quickly doze off. He always dozed off immediately. Was she introducing some calmateive into the ventilation system? Some mild drug into his food? He never knew. But it seemed like only moments after drowsiness fumbled over him, she would be around him, atop him, beside him or beneath him or — incredibly — everywhere at once. During these times, he often never opened his eyes, and never said a word. Nothing needed saying.

He let himself be woven into the net of her desires, to be manipulated during those dark hours in any way she desired. Always in a dim but well-known corner of his mind, he knew that he did not, would not, nor never would love her, and as long as he had that knowledge, she would touch him, but she would never touch him. So from the neck down, he restrained nothing.

When he did open his eyes, he would sometimes see her on her hands and knees, hovering over him, her face very near his own, and she would be smiling, smiling, smiling, and her eyes would be very wide.

"THE LANDER'S gone, the marigolds are re-planted. When do you think I'll be ready to meet other people. I've been studying all these notes awfully hard.

As hard as I ever studied anything.”

They were sitting at the dining table, beginning their second cups of coffee. They got on much better these days. He had stopped asking about how Winnifred’s people reproduced, why he never saw anyone walking in the streets, how old she was, or any of a thousand other things he felt he needed to know. She, on the other hand, told him anything he wanted to know about the social graces. She coached him with his practices. She was endlessly patient, forever helpful — but only in this area.

“I have never seen anyone work at learning such things as hard as you have. And Zortag . . .” Her attention wandered to the curtains, white lace curtains over the open, spring-morning windows. Yellow morning sun made them glow like woven filaments where electrons danced into visibility. She turned back to him. “I might offend you by bringing this up again after so long — but I have also never seen anyone so impervious to affection.”

Zortag held himself expressionless.

“I admit, during the nights I’ve been trying to seduce more than your body.”

“It didn’t work.”

She shrugged. “I couldn’t help hoping. But —”

“I told you it wouldn’t work.”

“But tonight, I am taking you out. There is a dinner party and I have arranged for you to attend.”

“Tonight? You think I’ve learned everything well enough?”

“There will be only women present. I’ll leave you there and pick you up three hours later.”

“You won’t be there?”

“I thought you would be more at ease if I weren’t there.”

“Probably,” he said. “Why are there only women there?”

She shook her head and sighed. He knew what that meant. It meant that that was another thing he would have to figure out for himself.

“And this dinner party — what’s the occasion?”

Another sigh.

“This is awfully damned murky,” he grouched.

“You just go out and do your best. Maybe you’d like to spend the day studying.”

“I would, I would.”

Zortag pored over the hundreds of pages of details he’d recorded. Several times he practiced his various walking styles in his room. Before his mirror he rolled his hands through the seventy-eight gestures Winnifred had taught him. It was exhausting, but it was the only thing that kept his nervousness at bay.

At 7:45 he stood before his mirror and dabbed away a faint slick of sweat that covered his forehead. “How does this look?”

“Don’t worry about your appearance — I told you. Whatever you wear will be considered appropriate.”

“I’m nervous.”

“You’ve mastered everything I’ve told you, so you have little to worry about.” She took his wrist and turned him away from the mirror to face her. “Zortag, there are two last minute details you should be aware of.”

“Let me get my pencil.”

“Forget your pencil — you’ll remember what I’m going to tell you. The first is that the people you’re going to meet are not like me. They will look different.”

“How different?”

"The second thing is that at first you won't be able to understand what they're saying."

"Why not?"

"After you're there an hour, you'll catch on. So don't let it bother you."

He turned back to the mirror and dabbed his forehead. "All right. Okay." Deep breath. "I'm ready. How do we get there?"

"We walk."

"Walk?"

"It isn't far. Come on."

IT WASN'T far, but Zortag wished, the closer he got, that it was further. The house, like all the other houses he'd seen on the way there, was single-storied and painted some pastel shade that he couldn't identify in the dimming twilight.

"Ring the bell," she instructed.

He rang it. He heard nothing tinkle or gong on the other side of the door.

"I'll be here at 11:00." And she smiled and drifted back into the twilight, back down the walkway, away from him.

The door opened. Zortag took a deep breath. But he managed to make the appropriate circular flat-handed gesture. The thing that stood across the threshold from him . . . (Zortag moved his eyes in the prescribed up and down scanning movement) . . . actually the thing didn't stand there — it sprawled . . . or kind of lay heaped up like a pile of cold dog food with little glistening beads of fat studded across its entire shape. Eyes? Zortag wondered. A small hole opened up in it and a skittery sound came out as it extended a lumpy "arm" and motioned Zortag inside.

As he stepped into the entryway he remembered Winnifred telling him that only women would be present. He looked back at the oozing dog food. Female? he wondered. Zortag swallowed with difficulty from his sand-dry mouth.

When he got his first look into the living room where the guests stood (?) and chatted (chittered, squeaked, barked, wheezed and whistled), he distinctly felt the blood in his head drain out of his head and pool in his shivering stomach. Those things standing there, no two even vaguely alike, looked like the dregs of some mad surgeon's zoo. Squid parts grafted onto a can opener . . . a head of lettuce decorated with door latches . . . a couple of horses' tails attached to a knot of broken glass and nails . . . all much larger than they seemed to need to be.

Zortag did the left-toe-in/ear-pull/limp-walk into the room. Several eyes turned on him. Something translucent and gobby hanging from a pole lamp swung a pseudopod into the air and waved it in a gesture that Zortag recognized: "You walk well," the signal said.

Zortag pointed to the bottom of his chin and stamped his right foot twice. Beside him, the dogfood shivered and moved away.

So this, Zortag thought, is why all the gestures are so important — different species, different languages, but most of them can wave a tendril or modify their movements across a room to indicate a mood or a compliment . . . But these species, he realized, were not relying as heavily on signs as he was — they were talking. And Winnifred had pointedly told him that he would be able to understand them after a while. What sense did any of that make?

Zortag found himself drawn to a creature that had two legs and stood upright. It also had a face atop its body, although the head was a dozen centimeters longer than human proportions would dictate and seemed to be con-

structed out of wet dishrags and cream-colored thermostat coils. But it was remotely human — how lucky he was, he thought, that he'd landed in the backyard of a humanoid.

Zortag stood on one foot in front of the thing — (“She,” he kept thinking, “it’s a she.”) — and pulled his other foot up to his groin, indicating a desire to become acquainted. Precariously balanced thus, he extended certain fingers, retracted others, and pulled down his lower lip with one hand while dragging the other through his hair, specifying that while he wanted to become acquainted, he was nervous about offending her because of his incomplete knowledge of her ways.

One of her dishrags flicked aside and she chattered vigorously. Her flipping right hand indicated that he excited her. Zortag laughed heartily, indicating that he found her lovely but that he preferred (with overtones of regret) to remain independent. He re-enforced the implied regret by snapping his two thumb-nails together in front of her face. Her coils uncoiled.

Time to move on, he thought. Like Winnifred, the raghead seemed to want involvement — that right hand kept flipping crazily. Zortag moved on.

But it was the same with the thing that seemed to be a collection of stitched-together abalone steaks. She kept flipping her right-hand steak at him. And the thing with all the earlobes did the same thing.

“Obsessed with forming attachments,” Zortag murmured to himself.

At one point he felt something tugging on his pantleg. A kind of heavily segmented worm with rows of clicking chicken beaks along its sides seemed to be trying to eat his pants off him. Zortag did not want to offend her — for all he knew, the worm was the hostess — yet he did not want to have his only good pair of trousers nibbled on. He made a dry spitting noise, an indication of wanting to be touched in an impersonal way only.

“You’re a cold fish,” the worm said. Its voice was high and tinny, like a human talking with a double-lungful of helium.

Zortag looked around the room, hoping that it hadn’t been the worm talking, that it perhaps maybe *please* could have been the upright thing that looked like a screwed-up computer chip on cat legs. But it wasn’t.

Zortag quickly raised and lowered his pitch as he asked, “You speak English too?”

“We all speak English,” the chicken beaks clicked. “Everyone.”

“I don’t understand this,” Zortag said, cupping his elbow with his right hand and pushing up the tip of his nose with the heel of the left, indicating interested puzzlement.

“Do you love anyone?” the worm chirped.

“Absolutely not,” and he emphasized that point by sucking in a pint of air, clenching his throat, and making a kind of choking hiccup sound.

“It’s no wonder you’re in the dark then,” the carpet-creeper said. “Why are you here?”

“I wanted to meet . . . people.”

“You came to Earth just to meet people? Weren’t there any where you came from?”

“Ah, no, I mean yes, there were.” He sniffed twice and poked his thumbs into his thighs to suggest that there was confusion but that it was dissipating. “You meant why did I come to this planet. Ah, just as a part of my job. Other people made the decisions about where I was to go. But now that you mention it, it seems that during copulation with one of my crew, it was mentioned that there was some kind of signal emanating from this area.”

"You heard us then. Curiosity brought you." Her voice contained a purling flutter.

"I suppose so." Zortag felt he might be taking a liberty by asking the next question he had in mind, so he knocked his elbows together three times and shot his left hand up over his head, as an apologetic preface. The worm rolled backward half a meter. "Why," Zortag asked, "does everyone look so different from everyone else? Are you all of different species?"

The worm bobbed its head, indicating tolerance. "The dinner is ready," it said. "Follow me, please." It squirmed toward the next room. Most of the other guests were moving in that direction, he noticed.

At first glance, the table looked normal enough. But then the oddities began standing out. Some places were set not with dishes but with deep cylinder-like bowls. Others were set with dangerous-looking skewer-racks. And one place had a nice white china plate, a knife, spoon, and fork, and a flowered napkin at the top of the dish — his place, undoubtedly.

"Sit here, sir," said a wet collection of reptile parts. It dinged the edge of the plate with a fingerhook.

According to well-learned ritual, Zortag stood atop the chair, did a knee-bend obeisance to the food, climbed down, dusted off the chair with the napkin, and did a rippling falsetto laugh as he seated himself. The others seemed to sit with much less ceremony, but the table was abuzz with a dozen layers of chitchat — and Zortag realized he could understand them now. Some way or other, they now all spoke English. Or did he just hear it that way? Was it some kind of telepathy?

"... lovely service she has."

"... charming variety of guests."

"... food's delightful aroma."

As Winnifred had carefully instructed him, Zortag rapped on his plate with "Really?" said the hot pulsing thing seated beside him. It looked like some kind of throbbing gourd with spaghetti sauce for skin.

"Oh yes," Zortag replied, snapping his fingers twice.

The bipedal raghead circled the table, ladeling a heavy soup into the deep bowls. She then circled again, hooking crisp-fried hunks of meat from a platter and dropping them on some of the plates. Once more she circled, depositing a slab of meat on Zortag's plate and skewering chunks of the same meat on the grills in front of the tendril-lipped carnivores of the group. Round and round she went, leaving one thing after another on their plates — vegetables, crisp black things, something that looked like blue tomato slices, and every time she placed something on Zortag's plate he rapped his spoon on the edge of his plate and announced more and more grandiloquent praises.

"My mouth is pouring saliva in torrents down my throat," he said once. And again: "May your recipe books be consecrated by god and made requisite reading for all mortals." And: "If all my intestines were filled with cement and I were eaten alive by ravaging disease, I would come to this table to sit among you to devour this food."

And he said more. After the third deposit of food on his plate, he felt the spirit of eloquence come over him and his compliments thereafter became more and more elaborate, with finer and finer distinctions. His praise for the blue tomato slices ran well over 150 words. He noted with pride that everyone listened carefully to everything he said. They hung on his words.

At last the eating began. The food that came to his lips did not, unfortunately, live up to the words that had just tripped so lightly there, but he forced it down

nonetheless. *Pro forma* he held his knife so the blade extended between his two middle fingers and he gripped the fork not with his fingers but with his clenched fist. "It is very important," he remembered Winnifred telling him, "that the grip on the fork be tight enough that the knuckles be white." Zortag's hand was tired, but his knuckles were indeed the whitest he'd ever seen them.

"You must be our alien guest," one of them said from across the table. Zortag couldn't tell who said it because their mouths were so unfamiliar and didn't seem to move in synch with the words.

"Yes, I'm from Earth."

Several of them exchanged puzzled looks.

"I call my planet Earth, too," Zortag explained with the appropriate circular movement of the eyes. "I am very amazed to find that you speak English here." (He slapped his knee and poked his cheek with his little finger to express his appreciation.)

"Are you exemplary of your species?" one of them asked.

"We all vary a little here and there — but, yes. Most of us look about like I look."

"Are all of your species of your intelligence?" the worm asked. It was sitting at one end of the table. Perhaps it was the hostess.

Zortag decided to answer with utmost honesty: "I am more intelligent than most." He licked the back of his hand to place moderate stress on that point.

The table was very quiet. Then the worm uncoiled, thumped to the floor and inched out of the room. The chicken beaks along its sides were silent. Then the dishrag-headed thing stood up and stalked out.

Zortag glanced at their plates — they certainly hadn't eaten much. Could they be finished already?

One after the other, the creatures slided out of the room, or hopped out, or swooped or drifted or bolted or scuttled away. Finally Zortag sat alone with the stack of gelatinous dogfood across from him. Its skin glittered brightly.

"I don't understand," Zortag said, thumping his food with his middle finger (puzzlement with overtones of disturbance) and raising his shoulders as high as his ears (emphasis of disturbance over the activities of others). "I don't understand this at all."

"You are an amazing person," said the little lips on the dog food.

"Thank you so much." Zortag made two quick snorts through his nose.

"You have managed to terribly offend everyone here, including me."

Zortag's blood turned to ice.

"You are a hopeless freak among us. Although we understand you probably cannot help yourself, you will have to understand if you makes us too sick to be around you. I will soon be losing my dinner. Please excuse me." It oozed off its chair.

"What have I done?" Zortag wailed. "I studied so hard. I tried to fit in!"

"You are disgusting. Your attitudes are as revolting as your manners."

"How do you know anything about my attitudes? I have tried to be so harmless, so polite . . ."

The dog food looked at him in disbelief — or it struck Zortag so, anyway.

"You are an amazing person," the thing mumbled as it left the room. After it passed the doorway Zortag heard a choking, coughing sound. Zortag had just made the ugliest thing he had ever seen throw up.

He sat alone at the still-laden banquet table. The food was still hot, the ice in the drinks was unmelted, and the tiers of candles were not even nearly half-burned. And he felt like he had a belly full of nails.

Zortag cried. He didn't understand it exactly and he wanted to stop awfully badly, but he couldn't. He cried on.

When his eyes cleared enough that the furniture didn't look like smearing watercolors, he made his way out of the house and sat on the curb, his forehead resting on his knees. He wanted Winnifred to come and take him away. He wanted a random car to skid by and run over him, to make his whole body weep blood and take him out of his misery in one blaze of pain. It didn't happen.

At 11:00 p.m. Winnifred touched him on the shoulder. "Are you ready to come home now?" she asked.

Zortag stood up, the world still blurry with weeping, and let her take him by the hand and lead him away.

"How was your evening?" she asked quietly.

He shook his head. "Horrible," he mumbled. "I don't understand what . . . happened." He found he could barely talk above a hoarse croak.

"Come home," she crooned. "Come home and it'll be all right."

He nodded. "I want to go home," he said. He felt like a child being led by his mother. "I want to go home now. I don't ever want to see any of those people again. Or anybody again."

"It will be all right," she said, putting one hand at the base of his neck and stroking him gently. "You'll see. You'll see."

At home, she carefully undressed him and put him to bed. He shivered as though he had a fever.

"I'm sorry your evening upset you so much." She kissed his cheek.

"I don't understand it," he whispered. "I did everything like I thought I was supposed to — but they hated me. I made them sick. They couldn't even sit at the same table with me." He stared up into her large eyes. "What happened?" he asked weakly.

"You are very different from them, and they knew it."

"I didn't look like any of those . . . people. But I tried to be likable."

"Zortag, you just aren't very lovable. You're likable, but you aren't very lovable."

He covered his eyes with his forearm and with his other hand pulled the sheet up to his chin. "You said you loved me."

"Not exactly, Zortag," she said softly. "I said I wanted to love you and I wanted you to love me. It has to work both ways at once."

He turned over on his face. "I'm going to die," he said into the pillow. "I can't live in this place."

Winnifred put her hands on his shoulders. "Of course you can live here. And you can take all the notes you want."

"Notes don't do any good." His words came in bursts between sobs. "I learned everything and it didn't do me any good. I learned it *all!* How come I'm not happy?"

She pulled on him and turned him over. "You aren't happy because you don't love anything."

"But I'd lose myself if I loved anybody."

Her eyes were very large now. "How much of a loss would that be, Zortag? What have you got now? Tell me what you have now."

He studied her face. Somehow it seemed to change — in what way he couldn't identify. Perhaps it was the lighting. "I don't have anything. Nothing."

"Except?"

"Except you. I need you — if it weren't for you, I'd . . . You're the only reason I have for living here . . . for living."

She put her lips over his and Zortag felt her tongue easing between his teeth, into his mouth. He started to wrap his arms about her back, but something old and fearful kept him from doing it — it seemed he would then be committing something greater than he could understand.

“Zortag,” she whispered against his lips, “you have to let go. You must let go.” Her body eased nearer his, like a cloud of warm mist.

He pushed her away. “I don’t understand anything. I’m afraid. I don’t know what you are.”

“I am someone who knew when I first saw you that you had no flowers in your life and I said ‘marigolds’ because it was a word I knew you knew. I said, ‘You scorched my marigolds’ because I knew you had done that in the lives of others. I knew what you had done before you came here — I *knew* you. As soon as I saw you, I *knew* you, and I wanted you. I am someone who became what you most wanted and then became indispensable to you so you would stay with me, because I need you. I *need* you.”

“You don’t need me,” he said with weak disbelief.

“Zortag, I need you more than you know. I called you — years ago I called you and you almost did not come. But now you’re this close —”

“You couldn’t have — you can’t have called me over so far a distance . . .”

“I did and you’re this close, Zortag. I won’t let you leave me again.”

“What are you?” he said again, this time with fear creeping into his voice.

“I’m someone who desires you above everything else.” She hovered over him on her hands and knees, her face nearly touching his. He could feel the heat from her body, even from that distance, beating down upon him. “I am someone who could speak to you and you would understand, even if you had no ears, and I could hear you if you had no voice. Nothing you would ever say could go unheard. Let go, Zortag. You are not alone with me. Let go. Someone is with you, beside you. Let go. You have nothing left to lose in your life, Zortag — let go.”

Knots — there were knots in him . . . tangled, intricate knots that had taken his lifetime to tie. They were hard and tight and Zortag felt that if his skin were ever peeled back, everyone would be able to see that he was not made of flesh and muscle and bone: they would see the intricate macrame of his soul, the solid knotted weave of his fears. He hated it all, every string and every thread of it.

“Let go of everything,” she was saying. “Let go and love me . . . love me.”

Zortag raised his arms and held them around her back, pulling her tight to him. He stopped thinking. It wasn’t a conscious decision — he just stopped thinking.

And he let go.

A great razor-edged sword slashed through the knots and he was left not with tatters and frays but with a single desire, with one last chance. He pulled her tighter to him. “I love you,” he said. “I want you.”

Again, he felt the odd sensation of something dancing over the top of his brain, the butterfly-feeling, half-pleasant, half-frightening.

“Hold me,” she said. “Don’t let go — don’t don’t let go.”

That was the moment it began. He held her across her back, and that part of her never moved, but against him . . . against him he felt a hot moistness, as though she were melting across his chest.

He did as she had asked and held her firmly, even though she seemed to become smaller, like her body was collapsing. Something warm tickled against his sides . . . and against his thighs, and over his heart there was a tightness as

something fastened to his chest — it tickled like the butterfly-tickling he had felt in his head. Zortag breathed deeply and could smell her skin near his face, a warm dry smell. And once again, whatever fleshy moistness was creeping around his sides began to move again. He felt something like arms enfolding him from his feet to his neck.

"Hold me," he heard her say again, and then he thought she had put her hands behind his head to hold his face to her lips — but that was not it. That was not it at all. She pulled him to her and wrapped herself around his head. His arms lost all their strength and fell back to the bedsheets and he felt her hands pushing his elbow and then his wrist beneath her and then they were wet and warm too.

"I'm being eaten," he thought vaguely, but it did not worry him. Nothing worried him.

Zortag found he no longer needed to breathe. He no longer needed to do anything. He floated in liquid warmth, without sight, without hearing, without care, and his thoughts were scattered like old leaves before a morning breeze. Through him ran a small but unending unending unending orgasm that twisted and shimmered at the slightest touch of thought. Zortag was in heaven.

WHEN HE was reborn forty days later, he had lost about 25 kilograms of weight and had gained a very interesting set of instincts. They were as specific and tangible as a set of written instructions. Unlike his dead human instincts which presented him with vague desires like "Eat food" or "Procreate" or "Kill enemies," he knew precisely what he had to do. There was no choice in the matter.

He knew as soon as he opened his eyes and saw that he had been transformed, that someone was coming and that he had to be there when that person arrived and that he would do anything, resort to any subterfuge, to get that approaching alien emotionally dependent upon him so that it would love him, need him, and want him.

Zortag had no specific sex now — he was ambisexual. In fact, he was not even Zortag. He had no name, just like Winnifred, who was not Winnifred now either.

What-had-been-Zortag lay heaped in the corner of the shelter, picking over his old human memories like old garbage. "I would have called myself a cannibal, a vampire," he thought with amusement. But what struck him most was how perfectly human he now felt, even though his appearance (rubbery, gray, rhythmically swelling with respiration) did nothing to enhance that feeling. "I am," he thought, "what I should have been all along. I am what I was meant to be."

He wanted to love someone.

He reshaped himself — he became an upright creature with several arms more than he had had as a human being, and he found it very interesting — and very ticklish — how he could rearrange his internal organs into any of a hundred different configurations.

Someone is coming something in him said. *Hurry. Hurry.*

He sensed the presence in the shelter of the-one-who-had-been-Winnifred. He walked by her and remembered what she had said — and she had been right: Now he knew everything, just as she had promised.

There were no "creatures" on this world. There was only one creature, and he, with his tens of thousands of new memories, his thousands of shapes and personifications, was it, and he was old beyond belief. He was eons older than

his old world. He and the one-who-had-been-Winnifred were now one and the same as much as two hands were part of the same body, and because of that, he had to look elsewhere for the kind of affection he needed — and there was someone coming. He had to begin his work. There was a seduction to be done.

He gathered his reams of scribbled notes and walked into the country, far away from the city, across stone-bridged creeks and through wet fields where the mud sucked at his feet and swallowed them up to his calves. At night he slept for short periods and ate whatever was at hand. He grew larger as he traveled.

Hurry something said. Someone is coming.

He hurried through smaller villages and into the hills that lay beyond an immense forest of tree-ferns. When the rains began, he reshaped himself to shelter the heavy bundle of papers he carried with him. A week after he had begun his journey, he came to a ravine that led upward to a high mesa and when he found the cluster of trees that he knew would be there, the voice said *Stop*.

Though the sun had already moved below the horizon, he worked. The rising stars saw him clearing the ground of brush and rubble and by the midmorning of the next day, he had constructed an enclosed shelter of interlaced branches and the thin papery bark he had peeled from the trees with great care. There remained only one thing left to do. Nothing, he knew, would seduce this approaching alien like a field of flowers to move in the breezes. *Tomorrow* the voice reminded him. *Tomorrow is the day.*

He worked. There would be flowers, a field of them, rising out of the hard dirt by the next sunrise.

SCREAMING FILLED the sky. Then he saw the speck of orange high in the cloudless blue sky. It grew larger until around the blazing orange brand he could make out the crooked spidery legs of a lander like the one he had arrived in when he had been an alien. More and more the thing slowed as it descended until, just above the ground, it hovered a moment, went silent, and dropped the last half-meter and then bounced gingerly on its complicated hydraulic legs.

He knew the shape of the alien that would momentarily reveal itself and he began reshaping himself — shortening his arms, readjusting the pigment in his epidermis, and the hundred other things that had to be done in order not to frighten the creature.

He stood at the edge of the field of flowers and waited. Some of the white flowers were charred black from the exhaust.

A latch snapped and the hatch swung aside. The alien peered out suspiciously, its face a small white oval. Then,

“Zortag!” its voice called out. “It’s me! Zenna Cowanna!” She scrambled down the ladder. “My god! What’re you doing here? You must’ve got out of the Ganzak a lot sooner than I did.”

He held out his arms. “Zenna! You lived through it all!”

“I’ve been decelerating and skipping in and out of the atmosphere of this place for . . . weeks, trying to slow down enough to land that thing. And now . . .” She beamed at him.

She was thin and wispy, as he remembered her — but now he was drawn to her, forced toward her by an instinct too strong to even think of resisting.

“I’ve never been so happy to see anyone in my life,” he said as he took her hand.

“Zortag! I never expected you to say anything like that.”

“Don’t expect the old Zortag,” he said. “He was defective.”

She laughed and pressed her face to his chest.

"Look," he said. "You've burned some of the flowers."

She turned to see. "I'm sorry," she said and started to say something else — but she stopped and looked very puzzled. Zenna reached down and cradled one of the white flowers in her hand.

"It's paper," she said, turning her puzzled eyes back to him. She spread its petals apart and studied it carefully. "And it has your writing all over the inside." She stood up now, half smiling, half frowning. "Zortag — there must be hundreds of these paper flowers around here. What on earth have you been up to?"

"I thought you might like them."

A little breeze rustled across the yard.

"I do like them. But why would you go to so much trouble for me? I didn't even think you liked me." She paused. "How did you know it would be me in the lander?"

"It would be so hard to explain," he whispered into her hair.

"The old Zortag wouldn't have said that either," she said, stroking his back. "He would have died before he admitted he couldn't explain something." She looked up at him. "I don't mind your mysteries."

He kissed her. He knew he could never let her go and that she would never want to leave. "Come inside," he murmured.

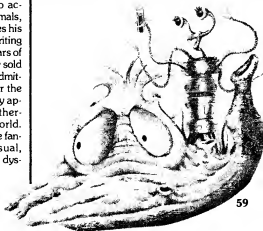
Like the answers to so many pointless questions, the white paper flowers rustled in the gathering breeze, and a few drops of rain fell. Minutes later, the writing on the flowers had begun to smear, dying them all a pale blue, but by morning, in the morning sun, they would be the purest white. And by morning, though there would be no Zortag, no Zenna, there would be no loneliness on the face of their world. ●

Wayne Wightman

Wayne Wightman hates writing biogs — tells us severe writer's block sets in and we can't blame him: he has been appearing in every issue. We could just refer you to the February, 1980 *Amazing* ("Do unto Others"), the July, 1980 *Fontastic* ("The Imprecise Delights of Love"), the August, 1980 *Amazing* ("Metamind") or the October, 1980 *Fontastic* ("Evening Promenade") — and be done with it. Or we could tell you he is a California literature and creative writing instructor who acquires and cares for various stray animals, runs a bunch of miles each day, makes his own beer, sails and who turned to writing SF about a year ago after some 15 years of mainstream writing. (He has recently sold a short story to *Omnif*). Wightman admittedly nutures a morbid fascination for the faintly grotesque and bizarre as they appear in life, disrupting what could otherwise be a nice, smoothly-running world. He has written a collection of science fantasy stories at once remarkably visual, satirical, violent, poignant, romantic, dystopian and yet strangely hopeful.

Why we chose this story

This writer is gifted in the art of supreme satire. His attention to detail and powerful visual imagery odd up to high entertainment. If you have read other Wightmon stories in recent issues (see biog) you'll begin to appreciate how the author feels about what's happening in the world — and how this could manifest itself in the future. We'd love to see the Lucas production people recreate the "mod hotter-esque dinner party scene" on film!



3 STRANGE BLUE POEMS

by Jim Barnes

1. Descent

Hovering over
the center, I
let myself go down
into the wood. Strange
I should come here
plummeting into dark:
silence at first until
my mind slowed down
then noise not noise,
an absence filling
itself. I feathered
myself with leaves,
waiting. A blue sun
now held dominion
above my precarious
perch. I could only
blink at possibility.
What was this place?
I drew the boughs
about me, expected
recurrence. The sun
cast off a frozen moon.
I moved deep into
the tree, waiting.

2. Initiation

Steeled against probability
I plunged into the dark side
of the mountain:
icicles speared my thighs,
frost vitrified my skin.
I swallowed
blue stillness.
Go on, I said.
A dance of the seeker
and his goal.
There was no path,
only icy stone.
No Arte Perilleux,
only icy stone.
Here I remained
with no lance, no grail,
naked, frozen, alone.

3. Omega

Coming back was hard
after seven eons
under seven moons:
something said come home.

I did not wish to leave
my place beyond
the curve of time.

Something said come home:
and I waked to a blue world,
digits and magnetic tapes
and mortal lust,
but hid beyond telling
the dream I would walk
into all nights of my life.

6:30 AM, my mouth tasted like the entire Russian Army had just marched through it and the videocom demanded a response. Despite the fact that it was only three hours ago that we had left the celebration, I managed to get out of bed and struggle to the terminal. I put the call on hold, then painfully doused my dry throat with a few gulps of lukewarm water. A few splashes on my face and suddenly I realized it was Saturday.

Who in the hell would call me at this ungodly hour — on Saturday? Not wanting to wake Janis, I took the call on the terminal in the other room. A man in his early thirties appeared on the screen. He seemed excited and somewhat nervous.

"I'm trying to get a hold of a Dr. Marcus Floyd," he said with a twinge of urgency.

I left the transmit switch on audio only. At six in the morning I did not consider it impolite. "This is Mark Floyd," I told him, "but it's not Doctor it's Mister."

"You are Mark Floyd the psychophysicist . . . the one working with the effects of drugs on extra —"

"Yes."

"I always thought you were a — not that it matters, of course — but I always thought you had a PhD."

"What can I do for you?" I asked impatiently, still somewhat amazed that this conversation was actually taking place at this insane time.

"My name is Rubin Stillman. First let me apologize for calling this early, but after reading the article in yesterday's Times, I knew I had to talk to you as soon as possible."

I thought about the press release. They always make a big thing out of nothing. "Look, we had some positive results, nothing conclusive. The story was blown out of —"

"Please, Mr. Floyd, it's extremely important that I know more about your work."

"Why is my work so important to you?" I asked suspiciously. "What is your field of interest?"

Mind over man and machine

TUTOR

by J. Ray Dettling

"It would be much better if we could discuss these things in person. Could we meet sometime this morning?" Stillman must have felt uncomfortable with my video off.

Although my curiosity was getting up, I wasn't about to blow the whole morning on just any kook. Finally I told him, "Look Mr. —"

"Stillman."

"— Stillman, I'm afraid I can't tell you anything more than . . . I mean the newspaper already told more than there is to tell." Stillman looked sincere, but I wasn't going to take any chances. There are an awful lot of people who'd do anything to discredit the work of the institute.

Then I remembered how difficult it was for me to get information from others when I first became interested in psycho-physics. Feeling a bit sympathetic, I tried a compromise. "Why don't you give me your address and I'll see that you get some literature and a PR film that was put together a few months ago. It'll be sent to you first thing Monday morn —"

"It'll be too late. I've got to meet with you today." Stillman seemed desperate.

"You're the only one who can solve our problem."

"Wait just a minute," I said, finally switching to video; "I don't even know who you are. All I know is you say you have a problem of which I know nothing and you expect me to stop everything and come to the rescue. I'm sorry Mr. — uh, Stillman, but my time is too —"

"No wait! Perhaps I do owe you an explanation."

I sat down and listened.

"I'm with AID — Artificial Intelligence Development. They make the most advanced computers in the world." A flash of pride lit up Stillman's face. I listened patiently while he continued. "Up until a couple of years ago our machines were small by computer standards, but they were innovative, and the software extremely advanced. AID was pushing the state-of-the-art in artificial intelligence faster than anyone else."

I wasn't looking forward to a sales pitch nor could I share his excitement over the achievements of AID. In an effort to force him to his main point, I tried interrupting, but he stopped me.

"Please Mr. Floyd, I don't mean to be tedious, but believe me it's all relevant."

I found myself apologizing.

"Two years ago AID began constructing the world's largest experimental computer based on the most advanced artificial intelligence schemes. Everything looked good at first, but then two months after it was completed and debugged, funny things started happening."

"What kind of funny things?"

"Well the output wasn't making any sense. It seemed unrelated to any input we had given it. Some of that is expected, of course, but that's what artificial intelligence is all about. At least that's the way we programmed this particular computer. It was programmed to receive any input we gave it, then it would solve complex problems by applying the first principles we had taught it. It would never make the same mistake twice.

"It would learn by its mistakes, but at an incredible speed so that soon it would begin to teach us. It was provided with a hunger for information and a strong drive to teach. We decided to name it TUTOR after it printed some insights to closed form solutions of the classical 'many body problem'.

"What the hell were 'closed form solutions to the 'many body problem'," I thought to myself.

"But then after a few other successes TUTOR's output was reduced to mere trivia. Finally nothing made sense at all."

"Look Mr. Stillman, I know nothing about computers. Why are you telling me all these things? It sounds like you need a top notch programmer to work out the bugs."

"Programmers, computer scientists, we have the best in the business." He paused for effect. "Mr Floyd, we have created a sentient being. I've thought about this a lot and you're the only one who can help prove it."

Now I was really beginning to wonder about him, and I still had no idea what he was talking about or where I was supposed to fit in. Obviously he was developing delusions about AID's creation. Understandable under the circumstances.

"Surely this can wait till Monday," I said.

"No it can't. My colleagues don't agree with me."

That was also understandable, I thought to myself.

"— They're convinced that TUTOR is malfunctioning. They're planning to shut it down and reprogram it unless I can convince them otherwise".

"Maybe this is a dumb question, but why not let them shut down and start over?"

I must have struck a sore spot. If he weren't so desperate I think he would have let me have it. Instead he stiffened up, as if to say, "You dumb ass don't you understand . . .," and nervously rubbed his forehead, frustrated and said, "What I'm trying to say is TUTOR is a living intelligence — a conscious entity. Not that I'm a moralistic prude or anything, it's just that I think we've stumbled onto something important. If they shut it down it could all be lost. You understand the conscious mind as much as anybody. You know its limitations and capabilities and I believe you can prove that TUTOR is alive."

Stillman must have sensed he was losing me. Before I could say "no" he held up his ace in the hole. "Does this mean anything to you?"

The question was ludicrous. Within half an hour I was on my way to the institute — to meet Stillman.

"WHERE DID you get these?" I asked shuffling through Stillman's charts.

"TUTOR made them."

I was utterly shocked to find a series of three digit numbers arranged in a column along side a column of geometric figures.

"When did these occur? Do you have the dates? Times?"

"Not for the first few, but later I thought it would be a good idea." Stillman looked genuinely relieved at my interest.

Within a few minutes all the charts were laid out chronologically. I recognized every one of them. Each had on its right side a column of four geometric figures. On the left side corresponding to each figure was a three digit number. There were almost a dozen such charts and on the last seven, each figure had a date and time marked.

Stillman remained quiet. Surely he knew my head was spinning. He waited for me to ask the next question. When I didn't he drifted away as if to give me some thinking room.

All I could think of was to go through my records and check the test times, while Stillman wandered patiently around the room scanning various and sundry objects. I still had reservations about him so I kept an eye on him, but most of my attention was on those dates and times. Maybe the charts were faked. The press release did say that geometric patterns and numbers were used in our tests, but there was nothing about the format or the number of numbers or the type figures. How could Stillman have found out all those facts? Even if he did know the facts, what purpose could he possibly have in faking the charts?

I rejected the idea that he received inside information. The test subjects were never told whether they were right or wrong in their guesses. I was the only one who had all the information. It was the only way to run an experiment in telepathy.

Of course it was unthinkable that a machine, an aggregate of semiconductors and cables, could have picked up a telepathic signal.

A few minutes later, much to my dismay, I discovered that every one of the charts corresponded to the minutest detail with those used in our experiments several weeks ago. There were only two explanations: TUTOR was psychic or somebody got a hold of inside information. As insane as it sounded, TUTOR had to be tested.

Stillman had other ideas. "What we've just done has confirmed my suspicion that TUTOR can pick up thoughts. I suspected this all along, yet I wasn't completely convinced until I saw your records. What I need now is an explanation of these."

Stillman reached for his briefcase and pulled out more charts. "This is what we've been getting during the last two weeks."

I looked them over. There was an assortment of words, symbols and pictures, about twenty lines per chart. After five and a half lines the output repeated.

"I'm afraid I cannot help you on these," I said somewhat intrigued by the pattern. "We haven't been conducting any new experiments. Most of the last two weeks had been spent preparing final reports and the like."

Stillman seemed genuinely disappointed. "Are you sure? Could someone else... who else is doing telepathy studies?"

"I can assure you that no one here has done anything. As far as anyone else, well I can only say I know of no one in the area. But then again, we know very little about distance effects on telepathy." I walked across the room and poured a cup of fresh perked coffee. I offered Stillman a cup but he was too upset to accept.

"I know this means something," he kept saying.

After optimizing the blend of coffee, cream and sugar, I took another look at the charts. "One thing I can say, if these had come from a human being, I would say he was trying to tell us something — desperately. Being it's just a machine —"

"It's not just a machine.. It has a consciousness, TUTOR did it all electronically. Remember it learns by experience, by trial and error, except thousands of times faster than us. And it never makes the same mistake. Don't you see, it can refine its own state of awareness to maximize its ability to receive even the minutest of signals."

"Yes Mr. Stillman —"

"Oh hell, call me Rubin. And I will have that cup of coffee."

"Okay Rubin. If TUTOR can receive telepathic signals, I too would be very interested in not seeing it shut down. If we could understand what part of its circuitry is responsible, why its applications would be infinite." I was beginning to realize there was much more depth to Rubin — that he was much more than the over zealous computer technician I had assumed he was. He had profound insight and he possessed a touch of elegance.

"First we must determine if TUTOR is really capable of receiving signals." There was no question about it as far as Stillman was concerned, but I still had my doubts. "After all, the last charts are still an enigma," I told him. "It could all be gibberish from TUTOR's own circuitry."

Stillman didn't object; so after calling Janis to tell her to count me out for any weekend plans, we started working on the test. AID was only seven miles away so it was an easy operation to check on TUTOR's output. The first thing I did was call our best telepath, Hector Alvarez.

He arrived with his usual garb, a woolen turtle neck sweater with spotless, just pressed, beige slacks that were at least five years out of style. He was a large man in his early 20's, and one of the few people I know who still wore corrective glasses. He was very much an introvert, a trait which I always assumed had reinforced his psychophysical abilities.

"I hope I didn't spoil your weekend," I said while edging him in.

He shrugged. "Nah, wasn't doing anything anyway." The answer was meaningless. It would have been the same whether he was doing anything or not.

"That's good," I said with feigned interest. "I'd like you to meet Rubin Stillman. He's quite interested in our work."

Rubin sprang over with his arm outstretched. Alvarez smiled and limply shook Rubin's hand. Outwardly they were as opposite as two people could be. Rubin was small, loud and hyperactive; whereas Alvarez was large, reserved and lethargic. For the first time I looked at Rubin and decided he would be a lousy telepath.

I gazed through my notes and verified that the drug Psycho-Tel 3 gave the best results. An hour later Stillman was on his way toward AID while the three cc, point one molar injection was taking effect on Alvarez.

TUTOR was still putting out its repetitive signal when Stillman called. He was ready to start the test.

From the stack of 30 different geometrical figures I selected samples at random and handed them to Alvarez. I also handed him a three digit number supplied by the random number generator in the desk computer. The odds of just matching the numbers alone would be 999 to the 30th power or roughly one followed by ninety zeroes. Matching these with the right figures would increase the odds by an additional 30 factorial.

WHEN STILLMAN returned we had established one irrefutable fact. TUTOR was telepathic. And the more I talked with Stillman the more I became convinced that TUTOR was much more than just telepathic. It was a machine that rivaled the human brain in complexity. All the subtleties of intuition, creativity, and intelligence were manifested by TUTOR. Except now, for some reason it was locked on to that same string of symbols and pictures.

NEEDLESS TO say, Monday morning TUTOR was not shut down. Stillman had all the evidence he needed, and with me to help him present it, we couldn't lose. In fact Stillman became somewhat of a hero at AID. Even the program manager, Frank Crenshaw, about whom Stillman had nothing good to say, credited him with a string of superlatives including "the most significant breakthrough in artificial intelligence." The big question remaining was "what do you do next?" Everyone was at a loss on that one.

Crenshaw immediately asked me to work with AID for awhile on a consulting basis. He was a crusty old bird, and behind that veil of current euphoria I could tell he was hard as nails and stubborn as they make 'em. Nevertheless, in spite of Crenshaw and my own backlog at the institute, the discovery was too important to turn away from. I accepted.

"Good," he said, "I'm leaving Stillman in charge. Whatever you and he come up with, we'll move along those lines."

For the next three days I learned as much as possible about TUTOR. It wasn't as large as I had expected. The real guts of the thing only occupied about half of the room which was divided by a floor to ceiling partition of tinted glass. The central processor unit and a bank of holographic storage discs were on the side of the partition where the temperature was maintained at a cool 60 degrees Fahrenheit. The lights were dim enough so that the multicolored backscatter from leaking krypton laser beams were visible through the partition. The effect was warm. The input/output hardware was on our side of the partition. It included several terminals and display screens — a flickering kaleidoscope of activity.

Soon, no matter how repulsive the thought was, I was forced to believe that TUTOR was a true conscious entity — a childlike with enormous potential. With each new shred of input no one could possibly follow the changes that were taking place over echelon upon echelon of TUTOR's neuroelectronic heirarchy.

The coordinated migrations of trillions of microscopic mobile filaments of light were no more predictable in TUTOR's core than the rush of synaptic orgasms in the human brain accompanying the formulation of a new concept. Stillman summed it up quite well. "If TUTOR is not alive, then we are all dead."

On the fourth day I began studying TUTOR's output from the time it started with its enigmatic repetitious display. The timing was precise, 13.4 seconds for each message followed by a pause of 4.2 seconds. At first I thought the content of each message was the same: Two symbols, the word "on", another symbol, the word "spheres" followed by an unrecognizable picture followed by "unpredict-

able" followed by four and a half lines of similar nonsense.

But then I noticed the latest output was slightly different. The second symbol was replaced by the word "evolved", and the last symbol on the second line was replaced by the word "unstable".

A little excitement flared up, then the mood returned to normal. No one considered the change significant, but something lurking in the dark corners of my mind told me those changes were important. They meant something.

THAT NIGHT I went home early. Janis had prepared my favorite dish, broiled cornish game hens, but I hardly ate. Thoughts of TUTOR and its repetitive output saturated my consciousness. Did the output really mean something or was it a manifestation of a faulty machine?

I went to the other room and Janis followed. "Mark, what's the matter with you?" she asked pathetically. "Ever since you've met this Stillman you've been acting like a perfect stranger to me and the kids."

"Janis please, what I'm doing is very important, and right now it's all I can think about. It'll only be a short time. Promise."

She looked at me and smiled. Her expression was a profound blend of understanding and skepticism. I reassured her with a hug, then as she left the room I took a good look at her. She was wearing a new crimson dress, and black, freshly coiffured hair gently fell over her shoulders. I knew she must be hurt. I hadn't even noticed until that very moment.

"Hey, you look fantastic," I said spontaneously. "When did you get that dress?"

"Well, may wonders never cease, I was ready to take it in and have a computer terminal printed on it — right here." She patted her behind, and with a seductive smile continued to walk away.

"Okay, I can take a hint."

"Don't put yourself out on my behalf."

We both laughed while I chased her to the bedroom. For the first time in a week TUTOR was the second most important thing on my mind.

The next morning I stopped at the institute to make sure our bread and butter programs were running smoothly. The first thing I did was stop at the coffee machine and deposit my thirty-five cents. Like usual the fluid poured more gray than brown. Just as I reached for my cup I spotted a manila folder someone left on top of the dispenser. It belonged to Alvarez.

I saw him in the hall so I handed it to him. He fumbled and a spiral wound notebook fell out. I looked down and couldn't believe my eyes. Alvarez was about to pick it up.

"Hold it!" I said sharply with unknown insinuations.

He froze.

"I'll take that." I added, whisking the notebook from the floor. The bottom half of the cover was filled with the same symbols TUTOR had been repeating except the format was different.

"Where did you get these?"

Alvarez was stunned, confused. "The notebook?" He stammered.

"No! I don't care about the notebook — the symbols; where did you get those symbols?"

"Uh, I dunno; I guess I was just doodling or something."

"Doodling!" It was apparent that Alvarez was sincere, but he looked as though I had accused him of selling out the government's most important secret.

"I'm sorry Hector. It's just that those — your doodling may be the key to an important problem."

"I don't understand."

"You will; follow me." I led him back toward the lab, stopping at my secretary's desk on the way.

"Call AID and tell Stillman to get his butt over here A . . . S . . . A . . . P!"

"Yes sir," he answered sarcastically.

Stillman arrived within fifteen minutes. By then I had explained everything to Alvarez, who until now, had known nothing of the nature or purpose of last week's test.

Suddenly he remembered about the symbols. "The Psycho-Tel had already taken effect," he said. "I remember because I was feeling very relaxed, but you weren't ready to start testing yet. I remember picking up a pencil and I guess I just wrote the first thing that came to mind."

Just then Stillman, escorted by my secretary, entered.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Rubin," I said excitedly, "take a good look at this." I handed him Alvarez's notebook. "Alvarez jotted these down right before we started last Saturday's test."

"It's the same — wait a minute. Are you saying Alvarez was transmitting these signals all along?"

"No, of course not. He would have to be sending continuously for the last four weeks or so. Besides that, the timing was too precise. No, it's quite clear that both Alvarez and TUTOR were receiving the input from someone else."

"But that's great. It clears up any doubt about TUTOR. It's picking up something *real*." I chuckled inwardly after realizing that Stillman was talking about his own doubts — doubts he couldn't admit before.

"Yes, but from who?" There was a silence. "Coffee?"

"Sure."

"Hector?"

"Uh, no thanks."

After my usual ritual with the cream and sugar, I continued questioning Alvarez. For the most part Stillman just listened approvingly.

"Hector, do you remember what you were thinking about right before the test?"

Before Alvarez could respond, Stillman broke in. "This is not the same," he said pointing to the notebook. "Some of the characters are different."

"I know; I was getting to that. Hector try to remember what you were thinking about."

Alvarez's face wrinkled, then he shook his head. "I can't remember."

"Here look at these." I handed Alvarez his notebook. "What were you thinking about? What were you doing when I called you Saturday morning? Try to remember. It's important."

Suddenly Alvarez's expression brightened. "Yes, now I remember. I was thinking about my astronomy paper I was working on for my class. It was due Monday."

"Now exactly when were you thinking about your class?"

"While I was waiting for our test to start."

"Good. Tell us anything else. Was there anything particular about the paper — anything?"

"— No, not really, only that it was due Monday and I still had to finish it." Then with some reluctance he added, "I guess I was a little worried about how much time I would have to spend here."

"Okay, just one more question. What made you finally remember? Was it something you saw on your notebook?"

"Uh . . . I guess it was the term 'main sequence star'."

"Fantastic!"

I dismissed Alvarez, then started on Stillman who was having trouble keeping up with me.

"What's fantastic?" he asked.

"Bear with me one minute. I think I'm on to something. Has TUTOR received any packets on astronomy?"

"Why no, but —"

"Please, this is important."

"TUTOR did receive a packet of general science, but it was bare bones. We haven't gotten around to anything in depth."

I paused a few seconds to check my thoughts, then excitement overtook me. "I've got it!"

"For God's sake Mark, what the hell are you getting at?"

I was so intoxicated by my own insight that I could hardly talk. "Don't you see, TUTOR needs more information. Here, look." I gave Stillman the notebook and the chart from TUTOR. On the first line where TUTOR used a meaningless symbol, Alvarez used the term 'main sequence star.' Without having any information on astronomy there was no way in hell TUTOR could have used that term. It would have to know something about the Hartzberg — whatever it is diagram —"

"Hertzprung-Russell diagram."

"Right . . . But on the other hand, looking at the fifth line we see Alvarez used the term 'alive' where TUTOR used the word 'sentient'."

"Did Alvarez know the definition of sentient?" Stillman asked.

"Aha! I see you're getting the drift of it. That's exactly what I wondered, so I asked him. He admitted he was unfamiliar with the term . . . But since TUTOR knew both terms we can be reasonably certain that 'sentient' was more correct . . . You see even with telepathy, you have to know something about the subject, and you have to know the vocabulary in order to translate it into words.

"But the thing that really got me going was that TUTOR's latest message had more information, that is, some of the old symbols were replaced by words . . . In other words TUTOR is getting *smarter*."

"Damn! I think you're on the right track. All we have to do is to give it more information and the message should clear up. I'll be damned, why didn't I think of that?" Stillman threw out his hands and laughed at his oversight.

"Don't feel bad," I told him. "Without you none of us would have gotten off the ground. Anyway I don't know about you but I don't mind sharing the Nobel Prize next year."

Stillman was caught off guard by my semi-serious comment, then his eyes seemed to radiate in a transient state of dreamy enchantment. "You know, I think we have a chance."

I never took the thought too seriously.

WE WORKED all weekend. My big concern was how do we get more information into TUTOR without interfering with its output or with its telepathic function. It was Stillman's insight that put me at ease. We stopped at a local bar that evening. The hors d'oeuvres were free and the drinks were cheap. The Giants were about to take the National League pennant for the third year straight. I bought the first round and reiterated my concern about TUTOR.

Stillman took a sip from his drink then placed it at arms length across the table. He had a habit of drawing imaginary diagrams on the table with his finger.

"Mark, you've got to remember TUTOR is programmed with a strong affinity for information, knowledge, call it what you will. I just didn't realize how strong. When we stopped inputting information into TUTOR, it must have tried getting

information by any means possible. It must have altered its state of consciousness millions of times until finally it picked up something."

"My telepathy subjects."

"Yes. It must have been extremely weak at first; but TUTOR could refine itself, like the blind man sharpens his hearing, until it was optimized to receive those signals. It's my guess that if we feed it information directly from the holodiscs, it would give up its telepathic reception; but as soon as we stop feeding it, its telepathic mode would return." Satisfied with his explanation, Stillman reached for his drink.

It seemed risky as hell to me. "But how can we be sure?" I asked. "How do we know TUTOR could even find the right state of consciousness?"

Stillman smiled. "Remember TUTOR never forgets and TUTOR never makes the same mistake twice. It won't even have to search the next time."

Three drinks later the Giants won the pennant, the hors d'oeuvres were gone and Stillman had me convinced.

MONDAY MORNING we presented our plan to Crenshaw. The euphoria was gone and his diplomatic facade gone with it. We argued for a good two hours trying to convince a program manager that our plan was the only viable alternative in spite of the risk.

By anybody's standard it was a pain in the ass working for Crenshaw. He liked to manage by threats and intimidations — sometimes effective against the sheep but absolutely useless against Stillman, especially now. Crenshaw was smart enough not to try it on me although he did get downright belligerent at times. As long as it came in small doses I could tolerate it. Besides that, whatever he laid on me I returned with interest.

Finally, after threatening to quit the program — bluffing of course — we got the go ahead.

We were afraid the message would eventually stop coming in so we moved fast. Stillman prepared several holodiscs on astronomy and astrophysics. The most difficult task was separating hard facts from theory. TUTOR had to know the difference. With Alvarez's help the job was completed in two days.

By Wednesday afternoon we were ready to input the new data to TUTOR. Stillman approached the terminal. Its input/output monitor still showed some cryptic message. After a final check he slipped the first holodisc in the slot, pushed the feed button and paused. A ready light flashed with the words "INPUT STANDBY."

Stillman looked over at me, then we both looked across the room at Crenshaw who frowned heavily. Then, with feigned resolution Stillman pressed the key labeled "SEND."

With uncontrollable gusto the laws of astrophysics were drawn into every corner of TUTOR's core. I could almost feel its personality changing, adjusting to its evolving electronic consciousness.

The display was blank, as expected, while megabytes of data were being absorbed. An amber rectangular light glared below the screen with the words "INSTRUCTION MODE." Two minutes and forty-three seconds later the light turned off. TUTOR was now an astrophysicist. But the screen remained blank and Crenshaw looked worried. "Why hasn't the message returned?" he asked pathetically.

For the first time in days Stillman was dumbfounded. He stammered "Uh . . . well . . . uh . . . I think it's —"

I tried to imagine how I would react if suddenly given an excessive amount of information. Indeed, it would not be surprising if human psychology had some

bearing on TUTOR.

"Maybe TUTOR needs time to soak everything up." I said.

Stillman, for an instant, looked relieved when I cut in, then with a flare of excitement he was quick to catch my point and add to it. "That's right. TUTOR must take the new information and categorize it."

"Well how long is that supposed to take?"

"I can't be sure," Stillman answered monotonously, only giving part of his attention to Crenshaw while daydreaming on the phenomena.

"Jesus Christ! The world's first telepathic machine and you managed to wipe it out."

"It's not wiped out," insisted Stillman regaining his confidence. "TUTOR has to reshuffle the data. It has to be put in context with everything it already knows. Right now it's in a transient state of consciousness . . . I think it will come out of it."

"I hope so Stillman." The words "For your sake" could have been added and the effect would have been the same. "I'll check back in half an hour," Crenshaw added as he was leaving the room. "You call me immediately if anything happens — immediately, you hear?"

"Right."

Half an hour later nothing had happened. I thought Crenshaw would go through the roof but he didn't. Hard to figure out. Maybe he was adjusting to the possibility that TUTOR's telepathic mode was lost. Perhaps it was a fluke, a manifestation of its previous neuroelectronic condition.

Several hours later, still no change. Crenshaw went home. Stillman and I stayed. We went over every detail, studied every data disc, searched the basic programs and came up with nothing. It was becoming clear that either TUTOR failed somehow or whoever was sending the message stopped.

For the most part the evening was a learning experience for me, and by the time 11:00 o'clock came around, I felt I was beginning to understand what this artificial intelligence thing was all about . . . And for the first time I thought I was beginning to understand how the human brain worked.

When I was on my way to the coffee machine Stillman yelled, "Mark! It's starting."

I changed directions in midstep and rushed to the terminal. It was incredible. It really was happening after all.

The excitement escalated to utter shock.

"My God," Stillman gasped. "Its coming from *outer space — a star!*"

I felt overwhelming excitement quenched by anxiety. I don't know exactly why, but my heart pounded so hard I thought it would crack. It was all too real — too impossible — incredibly important. My stomach fluttered, tickled by a million butterflies, and I had an uncontrollable compulsion to laugh out loud.

My control gave way and I let out a giggle. The absurdity of it made matters worse until finally I laughed with unabashed zest. Stillman watched me like I was mad, and indeed for the moment he was right.

"Mark, what's wrong? This is *fantastic*."

"I know," I said with difficulty, wiping excess water around my eyes. "It's beyond fantastic."

Then Stillman started laughing.

Finally the initial shock wore off and we were both ready to get back to work. Needless to say neither one of us went home that night. I forgot about Janis until she called. It was after 2 AM. I'm sure she was surprised to find me at the computer. I explained as much as I could to her about the importance of our work, but the excitement in my voice was more convincing than the words themselves.

There were still a few unexplained symbols, but the remainder of the message

was quite clear.

FIRST LINE: (SYMBOL) . . . EVOLVED ON TWO WORLDS ORBITING
MAIN SEQUENCE STAR 18.2
SECOND LINE: EARTH LIGHT YEARS AWAY. (SYMBOL) . . . NUCLEAR
REACTIONS PRODUCED UNSTABLE
THIRD LINE: STELLAR CONDITIONS . . . (SYMBOL) . . . PERISH SOON.
FOURTH LINE: LOCAL SPACE TRAVEL . . . (SYMBOL). NO ESCAPE TO
OTHER
FIFTH LINE: SYSTEMS. (SYMBOL) . . . CAN ONLY COMMUNICATE
WITH SENTIENT
SIXTH LINE: LIFE.

A star was going nova and a world was about to die. The whole thing was too fantastic. Stillman grabbed a book on astronomy and sure enough he found a suitable star, Sigma Draconis, 18.2 light years away.

CRENSHAW DIDN'T appreciate a phone call at 2:30 AM, but Stillman convinced him of the urgency and by 3:00 Crenshaw arrived.

"Mr Crenshaw, you're not going to believe this."

Paying little attention to Stillman, Crenshaw went directly to the display screen.

"What the hell's that supposed to mean?"

"I think its pretty clear that we're receiving a signal from outer space." Stillman said.

"Nonsense," Crenshaw laughed derisively. "It's just like you Stillman, always ready to jump on the offbeat —"

"I was right about TUTOR."

"Yes, TUTOR is telepathic which means it could pick up that signal from *anyplace*."

"From where? . . . Who?"

"Hell," Crenshaw threw out his arms, "I don't know. That's for you to find out . . . Ask TUTOR."

"We already did." My answer stopped him cold.

". . . Well?"

"It gives a 99.3% chance the message is coming from Sigma Draconis. That's the star that best fits the message."

Crenshaw scoffed. "Oh come on; you don't expect me to believe that this machine is picking up psychic signals from eighteen light years across space. Christ, if word got out, AID would be —"

"Mr. Crenshaw," I interrupted, "until we have a better explanation, that's all we can assume."

The debate continued, stalemated.

IT NEVER occurred to me until a week later that the message demanded an answer. It was pointless without one. I called Stillman.

"Rubin, I've been thinking . . . We've got to try to send an answer."

"It's no use. It'll never make it in time."

"I'm not so sure . . . The last line's the grabber. It's a request to communicate — perhaps just an offer —"

"Or a warning?"

Stillman's comment surprised me. Was there a chance the sun would . . . "No," I thought TUTOR had already considered that possibility. Conditions weren't right. The sun would remain stable for several billion years. But what about Sigma

Draconis? What happened to it? Suddenly I was worried.

But then there was another possibility.

"Rubin, have you ever read any science fiction?"

"Yes, quite often."

"Well there was a story, either by Asimov or Clarke. I can't remember for sure, but the name of it was 'The Star'."

"Yes, I remember," Stillman interrupted, "It was Arthur C. Clarke — won a Hugo I think."

"It was about a star that went nova, or rather supernova; and a civilization was compelled in a desperate attempt at immortality to preserve a record of its achievements."

"I remember the story."

"But what's important is that the civilization had to communicate. It could face death, but not oblivion. It couldn't let millions of years of achievements go to waste so it stored all its records in a deep vault with the hopes that some future civilization will discover them . . . Maybe we're witnessing the same thing here."

Stillman shook his head. "I hear you but so what?"

"We've got to try and communicate. That's all there is to it."

"Dammit Mark, it's futile. It'll take 18.2 years for a signal to reach it and 36.4 years for an answer to reach us."

"An electrical signal, but maybe not —" I thought for a moment. We've done some tests in rooms that were electrically shielded — Faraday cages. The shielding had no effect on telepathy. "— But maybe not *telepathy*," I finally said.

Stillman raised his dark eyebrows then frowned. "What are you getting at?"

"Suppose we can communicate back by telepathy?"

"Telepathy!"

"Lookit, why would the message expect an answer if it was impossible to get an answer there in time. Telepathy is entirely unknown to us. We really don't know how fast a signal travels . . . Hell, it may be infinite."

Stillman shook his head. "You tell me how to get TUTOR to send a telepathic signal out and —"

"Not TUTOR." I said. "Alvarez."

"Alvarez!"

"Sure, why not? We know Alvarez can send and TUTOR can receive."

Reluctantly Stillman agreed. "I guess it's worth a try . . . But let's keep Crenshaw out of this one. We'll tell him only if the test works."

"We could do it this Saturday," I suggested.

"Make it Sunday. Crenshaw has a golf tournament Sunday. I'll keep him off our back."

"Great."

It seemed somewhat ludicrous to expect the signals from one man to span across 18 light years of space. Surely it must require an amplifier of some kind. But what kind of amplifier? We didn't even know the nature of the signal yet. All we knew was it was a manifestation of intelligence.

There did seem to be some evidence that the signal can be concentrated in the direction of the subject. How or why it could be done was an open question. All that could be said was it didn't matter if the sender knew where the subject was or not. He just had to think about the subject.

I made it to the institute early Sunday morning. So did Alvarez. It was a good thing because it gave us a chance to talk. There was much I had to tell him. I had to make him understand the significance of the test and most important of all, to achieve any directionality or focusing of the signal, Alvarez had to know everything there was to know about Sigma Draconis.

Alvarez began punching the videocom keyboard. A channel opened and data instantly flashed across the screen. SIGMA DRACONIS: SPECTRAL TYPE . . . G9, DISTANCE . . . 5.52 PARSECS (18.2 LIGHT YEARS), MASS . . . At the same time Stillman and I had prepared a message. It was written with words but Alvarez was only to send impressions of the words — thought pictures, each one in itself worth a thousand words.

The message was simple:

WE HAVE RECEIVED YOUR SIGNAL. WE UNDERSTAND PART OF IT. WE WISH TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR CIVILIZATION. ARE YOU IN DANGER?

One thing that was nice about telepathic communication; it transcended language barriers — a fortuitous situation under the circumstances. Through telepathy, totally alien cultures could communicate with greater understanding than that of the most learned philosophers of the same tongue.

FOUR HOURS later Alvarez knew as much about Sigma Draconis as anyone. We were now ready to start the test. He seemed nervous. The Psycho-Tel 3 should reduce that somewhat, I thought.

"Hector, I'm going to give you 4cc instead of the usual 3."

"Whatever you think is right," he said. His voice quivered.

"Feel nervous?"

"Uh . . . little bit."

"I think the extra cc will help you to relax."

Alvarez agreed.

Stillman helped calibrate the electronics while I attached the EEG on Alvarez who was sitting in a biomonitor recliner. The recliner was ideal for this type of test because one's vital signs could be accurately monitored with minimum distraction to the subject. Also we positioned the recliner such that Alvarez could not see through the glass door to the adjacent room where the videocom terminal was kept. The videocom screen was linked to TUTOR's output display.

I gave Alvarez a final set of instructions. "Okay Hector, while the drug is taking effect I want you to try and relax."

His head sank into the cushioned back and his eyes closed. I spoke softly while Stillman watched from a distance.

"Think about Sigma Draconis teeming with intelligent life — trying desperately to reach your thoughts. Feel them. Experience them. Let your thoughts reach out across the light years and touch theirs. Feel the utter tranquility. You have all the time in the world, so when you feel you are ready, let our message project outward. Then dwell on each thought until you can feel it reach them. Until you can see it enter their consciousness . . ."

Alvarez seemed relaxed, his eyes still closed, his breathing slow and constant.

"Take all the time you need," I reassured with a nearly inaudible voice.

To eliminate any distraction, Stillman and I quietly left the room and watched the videocom. For several minutes TUTOR's display screen showed the same cryptic message. Suddenly its output fluttered. Fragments of Alvarez's thoughts began interfering. The interference increased until the output looked like random noise. Then in a fraction of a second everything went blank.

Thinking absurdly that the blank screen signified some danger, my first impulse was to go to Alvarez. Stillman stopped me. "I think TUTOR is getting something," he said.

That possibility changed my priorities.

But the screen was still blank. I started to speak but was hushed by Stillman as if any extraneous noise would upset the delicate psychic link that was hopefully forming. For a few solemn moments I looked wide-eyed at the screen afraid to blink. How could we even dream of success? It seemed far too much to expect after already lucking out on two remarkable breakthroughs. But then again maybe we could hope. After all the big breakthroughs would inevitably lead to a string of corollary events.

Suddenly my thoughts were broken when the screen came alive with electrifying reality. An endless chain of words . . . words describing an alien culture, leaving no question as to their origin. A stargate was opened — a new window to the universe. Alvarez sent pictures, each worth a thousand words, and now each returning star word was worth a thousand pictures.

And the pictures were within TUTOR — electrons and photons in strange symbiosis coalescing and dissipating into patterns of inconceivable complexity within TUTOR's labyrinthian microstructure.

And across the glass door — something entirely unexpected. A man stiffened in a recliner, eyes glazed with panic, ecstasy. There was no question about it. The pictures were in Alvarez too . . . ●

by J. Ray Dettling

The Earth has completed 38 revolutions about Sol since the day I was born in San Francisco. Early in life I discovered the power of the telescope and from that time I decided I was going to be a scientist.

I worked my way through college, where I majored in physics, by playing in a rock band weekend nights and practicing chemotherapy on little white mice weekend days at Stanford Research Institute's Cancer study center. After receiving my BA in Physics I took a job teaching mathematics and science in a San Francisco high school for four years. At the same time, with a life savings of approximately \$500.00, I decided to invest in a small corner bar which I remodeled and renamed "The Outer Limits".

In 1968 I sold the bar, quit my teaching job and started working in industry as an applied physicist on a wide range of technological forefronts. Much of my time was spent writing technical proposals and reports.

Finally, I got interested in writing science fiction (which is close to writing technical proposals).

Presently I am working 3 days a week at United Technologies on advanced space propulsion systems. The remaining 4 days are spent writing and lecturing on science fiction and speculative science fact. In addition to several short stories I have completed one novel entitled "Celbios"

which is currently fishing for a publisher. Also I am working on a science fact book entitled "Futures Fantastic" (*Ideas from which make up our feature science series by this same writer, first installment in this issue*)).

Last but not least I have been living with a super lady, Tess, who not only corrects my grammar and spelling, but also works 3 days a week, plays in my band and takes care of 5 children. In our spare time we are building a house which we will be moving into by the end of this year.

Why we chose this story

Some people refute and some worry about the possibility of ultra-intelligent machines. If the development of such a capability went like this, detractors could relax — or maybe even rejoice. A satisfying story about a timely subject. Well handled by our FUTURES FANTASTIC columnist.



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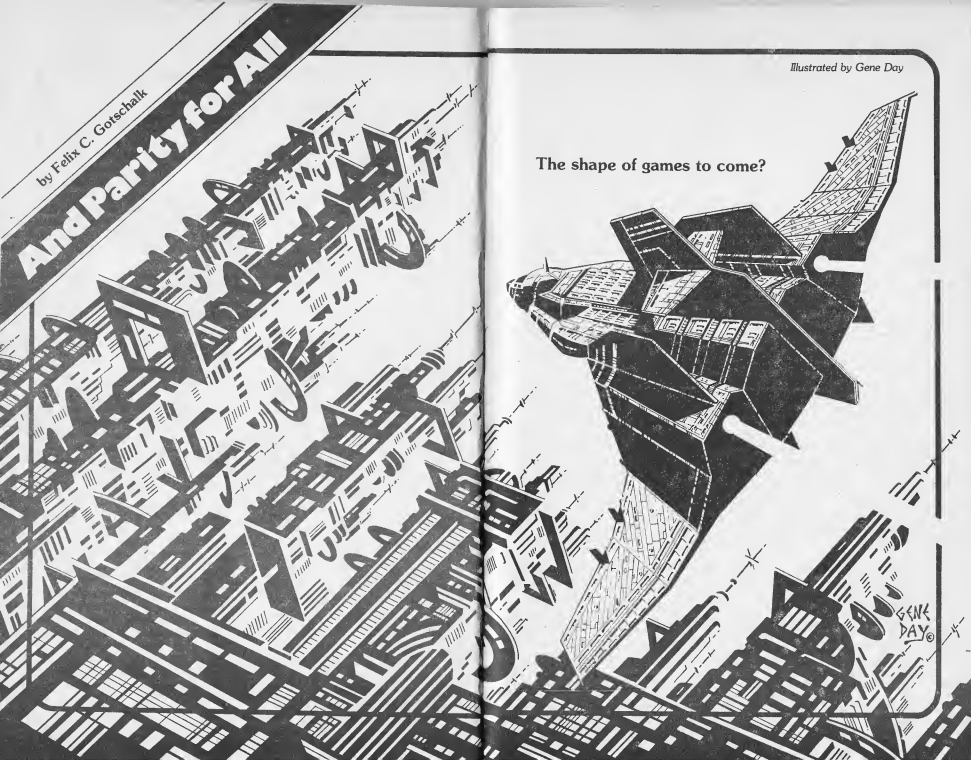
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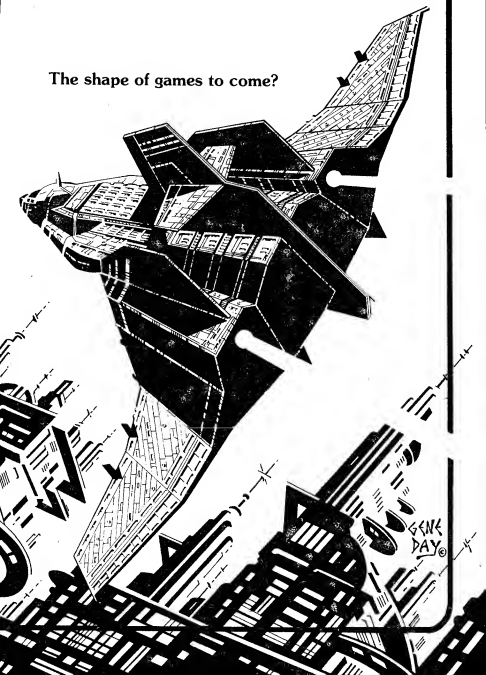
by Felix C. Gotschalk

And Parity for All



Illustrated by Gene Day

The shape of games to come?



The Belgian cobblestones on Broad Street hill glistened their simulated wet sheen in the late evening rain, so that their gentle convexity was accentuated, and they looked rather like hundreds of small loaves of shiny gray bread magically set there on the concourse of the great one-eighteen-thousandth scale city. Ben Flack sat in the air-car, slouched deep in the throne-seat, as the craft sifted down the hill at 96.54 kph, spraying out a roostertail fan of mist. The ancient railroad viaducts loomed ahead, flashed close over the bubbletop, then disappeared behind him. Inside, Ben's audios tuned to all frequencies: the route manifest bleeped its quadrant, sector, and vector sounds, the freon compressor sighed its coolant message, the huge plastic airfan beneath screamed its muted 90,000 rpm bass line, and an army of relays clacked and snicked and clapped their tiny metallic hands.

"Oh for the life of a regional courier in the UR-240 game," Ben began to sing, and Bo, the co-pilot, quickly interrupted him.

"Wait until our 1/18,000th asses are safe before you sing, man," he said, squirming in the impact-neutralizer field, "the East End roverpak damn near did us in last week —"

"Yeah," Ben said, "who would have thought they would use recoilless rifles. I wonder where they got 'em, and who showed them how to set up a battery." Bo wiped oily beads of sweat from his upper lip and adjusted the freo setting down to 21.1 degrees Celsius. "It's the Fulton Down-Unders supplying them, sure as hell," he said, "they're too street-smart to risk their troops now. Besides, Big Dummy has been programming in fairly complex strategies lately." The intercom purred a soft psychophysical tone, and a red light-point flashed. Ben flicked the controls.

"Baker Zee Six here," Ben said.

"Central Control," came the female voice over the intercom, the voice both neutral and sexy in husky tone, "we have a satellite viewer showing medial arc howitzer fire at one o'clock. ETS five seconds for course change. Buckle up, lads."

"Roger, CC," Ben said. He and Bo stiffened in their harness-mesh and Ben closed his eyes. The aircar gave a 2.8 g relative lurch, and then began a negatively accelerated parabolic climbing arc. The men felt themselves pressed deep back into the inflated throne-seats as the craft gained speed to 321.8 kph. They shot up through the simulated asepsis screen, through the satellite perimeter, and leveled off in the coppery-dusky sky at 914.4 meters scaled altitude. Below on the ground, the ancient howitzer shells smacked into the cobblestones and exploded. Atop a camouflaged fire-control tower, a bald roverpak officer fumed, his arms akimbo, his cross-hatched, stitched face red with anger.

"How could they have known to pull up?" he cursed, "that would have been a good hit."

"I told you and I told you," the gunner said, angry but whining, "these howitzers are like shooting arrows straight up. The CC couriers could do a Maypole dance down there before having to take evasive action."

"Just you stick to pushing the fire button," the officer said.

"Aye, aye, Srrrrr," the gunner sneered, "that's all I can do anyway. Big Dummy up there can cut us off anytime, you know."

"Radar," the officer barked, "any more Bogies on the screen?"

"One fat one, starting a run at Parham Springs, low and skittish, like a man running cover —"

"That's too far away for us —"

"Bogey at noon high!" the radar voice spat, "at 304.8 meters — Christ, it's making Mach Three!"

"Got him visual," said the officer, "we might as well be using pellet guns. All I can do is watch him blast by." The Bogie appeared in the sky first as a dot, and grew

into a deltablast aviette shape as it sizzled across the skyline of the 1/18,000th scale city. It disappeared behind a cluster of towering buildings and shot off toward the coast-line, its simulated sonic boom crackling behind.

"There goes a full load of UR-240, goddamit," the officer slapped his thigh with his swaggerstick, stinging himself more than he intended. The gunner muffled his giggle with his gauntleted hand.

Hovering at 914.4 scaled meters altitude, Ben and Bo waited for new route codes, feeling vulnerable in the tiny aircar.

"We're sitting ducks —" Bo began.

"Baker Z-6, this CC, acknowledge?"

"Baker Z-6 here."

"Straight down to 304.8, azimuth B-16 to Northwest quad. Four Immelmann turns at stall speed, shoot-the-shoot to tree-top, then Mach One to 457.2 altitude, and bee-line for the veil over the James."

"Got it, CC, that'll be one helluva ride. Big Dummy's getting complex."

"ETS ten seconds. Buckle up."

"God, aren't there better assignments?" Bo moaned, "ferrying UR-240 through the hostile megalopolis isn't exactly a milk-run game — oh shit, here the change comes —" The aircar began to drop like a plumb bob, and the mens' stomachs did not seem to want to drop nearly as true nor as fast.

"At least let them give us override options on this — say, do we have them?" Bo asked Ben.

"Negative. Enjoy the ride, man. This load will get the city damn near parity again. The game will be halfway won again."

"It's a helluva note when the good micro-guys have to sneak UR-240 through the bad micro-guys' lines in order to keep the whole damn city from quaking, and to amuse a dumb macro-kid up there."

"Parity is an ancient physical law, my micro-friend," Ben sounded paternal, "molecules are held together by surface tension, and by right and left-handed atoms —"

"Yeah, I learned all that jazz in micro-school."

"And this city — Big Dummy's toy city — is held together by forcefields that are absolutely dependent on parity re-charging. You remember what happened to the Fredericksburg Dome in the game?"

"Yeah. It blew away, due North."

"Like a young tree, bent to the ground, tied, and cut loose — hey!" The aircar sang along a slightly descending arc, and the monoliths of the Northwest Quad of the city appeared, like faceless building blocks crowded on dappled flat plains. A puff of simulated flak appeared 109.3 meters to port.

"Random visual shot," Ben said, "not halfway close, but it reminds me that my game name is Flack."

"Yeah. Ready for the Immelmanns," Bo said. The aircar hovered at stall speed, and began the slow, wrenching WW I turns. On the ground below, a Northside roverpak observer wondered aloud about the maneuvers. He hoisted his heavy BAR to offhand position and fired a quick burst that fell short of the aircar.

"Ground fire at five o'clock," the CC voice broke silence, "no course correction necessary."

"Roger, CC," Ben said, "let the little rover fire at us with his popgun."

"Rocket fire at two o'clock, atop the MCV mono, cut to three Immelmanns."

"Roger, another boy with a toy."

"I don't share your confidence, Ben," Bo said, "last week, D-6 got it smack in the jet-pak with one — one single rocket."

"Live it up, Bo. Being a worry-wart won't increase your combatlife in this game,"

Ben said, relaxing in a cockpit chaise. A 12 mm rocket shot by the aircar 109.3 meters starboard. Far at the Western edge of the 1/18,000th scale city, aircar E-4 squirted along a debris-strewn boulevard, headed for parity port East. Its mission, like those of all the ten, round-the-clock aircars, was to deliver lodes of UR-240 to specific points along the perimeter of the city, thus keeping the area in parity; assuring the radiational integrity of the geologic grid supporting the city. As long as the molecular fields pulled at each other, as long as domes and veils and plates and geodesics maintained surface tension (and, as long as the macrokid, Big Dummy, kept the power supply plugged in), the scaled city could continue its war game in microcosm. And why did the small model city need the war? Because in the game of UR-240, micro-man was held to 97% raw libidinal energy and thus required constant autonomic enervation. Bo was feeling disturbingly quiescent today, and Ben read the man's cranial disc as fading. He vectored in a six ampere hypothalamic kicker — "I'll stomp your ass seven ways on Sunday," Bo flared at nobody in particular. The craft dipped its shark-nose and accelerated downward at 30 degrees. "Shoot the goddamn shoot!" Bo shouted. As the aircar swept down toward the city, both men could see the simulated greenish mold on the ancient roofs, the dull quartz walls of the monoliths, the spidery maze-boxes of the storage decks, an occasional church spire, and the deep canyons called streets. The aircar whistled between the 200-story Faisel-Opec Tower and the 100-story Carter-Exxon Spire, the spire still black from the simulated fire bombings. A very brave geriatric clone was flying a bright red and white biplane along at 152.4 meters, and the old man saluted Ben and Bo as they skied past him 45.72 meters away. Now the aircar was skimming low over one of the deserted streets, its smooth belly just above the traffic lights. They flew past department stores, theaters, churches, hotels, parking decks, service stations, piano stores, delicatessens, auto parts kiosks, warehouses, boutiques, florist shops, saving and loan offices, courthouses, post offices, coal yards, laundries, machine shops, granite quarries, mortuaries, hospitals, newspaper plants, oil storage yards, used car lots, paint factories, pharmacies and physicians' complexes. Then out over the sandy wet bogs of the central park they flew. The kudzu was five feet deep in the southeast quad of the simulated city, like a thick green rug growing at the base of the buildings. The last thing Bo saw was an opera dome filled to bursting with truffle-spores, and then it was that the Mach I ride began. The aircar shuddered as anti-grav power was programmed in, and the tiny craft shot up in a 20 degree climb at a scaled microterrestrial airspeed of Mach I (519.7 kph). The buildings whizzed by, then slowed, and dropped away beneath. Soon there were no visual cues to the great scaled speed of the aircar, although both Ben and Bo were programmed to feel somesthetic cues.

"Hey, tracker — jet at 3 o'clock, and closing fast!" Ben shouted.

"BZ-6, CC here, we have a bogey closing on you at three o'clock — override option authorized —"

"Thanks for nothing, CC," Bo muttered, "we saw him first." The tracker jet's tiny sonic cannons flashed blue, and a cone of ultrasound spread out toward the aircar. Ben sat the craft on its tail and blasted straight up to avoid the spreading cone.

"Big Dummy must be using more of his smarts today than usual," Bo said, "punching game-codes for ancient howitzers, tracker jets with sonic cones — have you seen his big ugly face today?"

"Yeah, I saw him peering through the top of the box early this morning. He was picking his nose."

He hasn't played with us for about a week, I guess we're not his favorite game anymore."

"God, if I were a macro-kid, I'd love to play with this micro-city of ours. I don't even know of a better micro-game anywhere."

"How big is the Big Dummy again?"

"Compared to us, he stands 381.0 meters high, about as tall as that famous building — what was it called — the Empire State Building."

"I can't get over the fact that we are living our micro-lives inside a glass box that is, in fact, a war-game toy for a macro-kid."

"I never think about that. My guts feel real, thick steaks taste good to me, women feel soft, we get to keep stirred up. The fact that we all are simulated doesn't seem to take the good edge of micro-living."

"Mach Four bee-line for East parity port," the CC voice beamed in. The aircar leveled off and accelerated to 2078.8 kph.

"Christ, what a speed to end the day with! Looks like we're home free today," Ben said, "they'll never catch us with anything at this speed — hey, there's Big Dummy now!" In the south quad, the sky filled with the image of a face: a bloated, mottled, asymmetric, soft-fatty boyish face. It filled the entire space of the quad, and then moved so that the top of the huge bobbing head went almost to the high noon position.

"The big ugly shit is going to cut us off again!" Bo cried, "Hey, Ugly, wait a minute — wait a while! We're the best micro-game you've got, goddam your hundred story macro-brat hide! You mother grabbin', granny hoppin' son of a macro-bitch! You can't put us back on your playroom shelf, we've barely made three runs apiece!"

"Yeah," Ben brayed, "us micro-people have rights! You can't just unplug us when you get tired of playing. One-eighteen-thousandth scale people have rights too! Rights! Rights!"

The sky began to fade, the aircar slowed, Ben and Bo's faces fell flaccid, and the turbine-pitch whine in the air began to drop slowly.

"Just when we were ready to complete another good run." Bo's voice pitch wound down, like a dying siren. The aircar stopped in micro-space and hung there, still as a painting. On the micro-ground below, there was no movement. The East End fire control officer stood, frozen in a clumsy gesture, and the gunner's face was set in a curled-lip sneer. The old man in the biplane was set in a gentle banking turn, close to the Capitol Dome, the old man's white scarf still stiff and streaming in the motionless air. The micro-game setting was returning to molecular rest.

The fat-faced macro-boy looked down at the transparent box set on the long table. "Why'd you cut it off?" a pretty macro-girl asked, standing beside him, "it's your very best game." The box appeared big as an oversized coffin, easily 3.6576 meters long, .9144 deep and .9144 wide. Inside lay a beautifully detailed city in wondrous accurate scale: hundreds of buildings, towers, spires, parks, streets, rivers, freeways, and, of course, vehicles for war games, and micro-people to operate the vehicles. An aircraft, barely big as a half-sized fly, hung in the space, and close by, another craft emitted a fire-cone of something, frozen in stop-action stillness.

"It was going to be another draw," the macro-boy said to the girl, continuing to punch in CLEAR codes on a computer-like panel next to the game, "next week, we'll program it for a one-sided win, have the parity fly the coop, and then we'll get to watch the quake —"

"Daddy'll be mad at you."

"No matter. It's an old parity game. Everybody's going to the 1/36,000th scale

now. I want one for Christmas — maybe a take of the African-Cuban Fire Wars.”

“Hey, you want to throw Frisbees?”

“Yeah, I don't mind.”

The two macro-children lumbered from their playroom, past the wondrously detailed scene in the clear coffin-sized box. They plucked light plastic discs from a toybox in the corner. Outside the macro-turf was lush and green, and a huge gold sun filled the sky from horizon to overhead. It was a fine day for Frisbee-throwing.

Felix C. Gotschalk

I grew up in Virginia, was a teenage machine gunner in the Marine Corps, and then spent seven years in school, taking a doctorate in psychology at Tulane. I have been a psychologist for 20 years, raced a Porsche in the novice class briefly, have been a Mercedes collector, and have been trying to learn to read music all my life (I am a good keyboard player, but the musical notation is Greek to me). I have been submitting stories for about 30 years, and now have about 100 sales, and no best sellers. I like feminine women, black cigars, cognac, and arm wrestling, roughly in the order of their importance. I have been in Mensa, and usually say (if asked)

that my IQ and weight are approximately the same, at 215. I strive for humility in my generic superiority.

I had a story in December 1975 *Fantastic* (“Pandora's Cryogenic Box”).

Why we chose this story

What happens here may be cause for a shudder when you hear all the little beeps around the house next Christmas or whatever. We liked this extreme view of electronic gamery.

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Fear Therapy & Incontinence

by R.D. Brown

An Adjustorship 3 in the Federal Department of Credit Reconciliation is a depressing position. When Dale Gillespie observed his fortieth birthday as an Adjustor 3 with little chance of advancement, his depression increased.

Then, a couple of weeks later, both his wives left him at once, and he started seriously considering suicide.

Sheila was no big deal. She was a mean bitch he'd only taken on because his roommate, George, wanted her and George's wife (at the time) had been a Dolomite, a religion demanding reciprocal monogamy, which rule they obeyed to the letter and no more.

But the loss of Beatrice (his sixth) was a severe blow.

"I don't understand why you're leaving me," he said. "You tell me you still love me."

"I do," she said. "But it's just too damned depressing around here. I'll be back when you cheer up."

"But how can I cheer up when you're not here?"

Beatrice grinned. "That was pretty good, Dale. But not good enough. I'm tired of being depressed. You're contagious."

"I know why you're leaving, Bea. I'm forty years old and still an Adjustor 3/cl. And I don't blame you . . ."

"You're wrong, Dale. And it's one of the reasons you're depressed. You're doing it to yourself."

He gave the same reason to his shrink and his shrink disagreed, too.

His shrink was a scowling, leonine man named Horace Flayer, a pain therapist



for twenty years, only recently converted to Fear Therapy. The touchstone of his conversion was his two-volume work, *Fear Therapy and Incontinence* (unread by Dale, but in his library, the only touch of solidity in his paperback shelves) which the *Neurometrics Review* described as "seminal."

"Hell, Dale," Flayer said, when Gillespie, teary and red-faced had told his story, "it's not as if you had to support them or anything. They get their monthly credit allotment same as you. The problem is that the repulsive personality you've been developing over the past few years scares them away. It's a well-established fact that sons of famous fathers develop progressively more bizarre personalities as they pass their fortieth birthdays. Perhaps Beatrice was aware of this?"

He studied Dale's reaction to this carefully. One of the biggest problems in Fear Therapy was that fear was a difficult state to induce continuously in patients—it was so wearing, and they tended to slide into comfortable thoughts. The most fertile ground for fear was constant anxiety, which in turn was best brought on by frequent irritation. Dale shifted a little in his studded seat and scowled, but gave no verbal response. More was called for.

"Of course, you've made it worse by going into your father's line of work. You've been making yourself worse ever since you started indulging your resentment of your father's success."

"I don't resent my father's success," said Dale through clenched teeth.

"Of course you do. Even if I granted that you didn't, still you should never have gone into the credit game. Too damned many people in it anyway. Of course it's too late now. You're sunk. Too set in your ways to go on to something new. It's no myth that learning becomes more difficult with age."

"God," said Dale, "you're right. My condition is hopeless."

"Yes, pain and death are at the end of every journey," the other said with a smile. "Which reminds me." He turned to the door and bellowed, "Nurse Custis, come in here and witness this."

When the nurse came in he said, "I'm giving you formal notice of a twenty-percent price hike."

Dale wasn't particularly bothered by this last. It happened monthly. Each month all places of business were allowed to raise their rates twenty percent. Since all wages automatically increased twenty-two percent, most businesses raised the full allowed percentage, but it required formal notification.

The other needling did disturb him, as it was supposed to, but this was compensated for by the feeling he got talking to Flayer of having a solid, down-to-earth talk about Reality, no holds barred, man to man, and like that. Fear Therapy, in short, made him feel better.

He worried about this on the way home to roommate George. Fear Therapy wasn't supposed to make him feel better, it was supposed to make him well-adjusted—not necessarily the same thing. It depended on what you were like to begin with and what you were trying to adjust to. His Fear Therapy must not be working. But he couldn't go back to pain therapy, it was just too . . . painful.

He was working himself into that state of mind Horace Flayer called "congenitally self-defeating." He thought about that, too, making it worse, and in his blind worry came within an inch of stepping on George, who was lying on the living room floor in some sort of stupor. Dale stumbled in his attempt to avoid stepping on him and caught himself with a bang on the bare wall. "I'm terribly sorry, George," Dale said. "I almost stepped on you."

"So what," said George. "Join the crowd."

"What's the matter, George?" Dale commiserated.

"Now there are no women left in the apartment at all. None. Barbara left me."

This goddam thing is contagious.”

“I’m sorry, George.”

“What’re you sorry for? You’re always blaming yourself for things that aren’t your fault. That’s one of the things that’s wrong with you—that and your brooding resentment of your father.”

“I swear, I think about my father less than all my friends and acquaintances do.”

“And with good reason, too, after what he did to the country. Has the thought ever crossed your mind that maybe politicians create their policies by looking for the stupidest ideas they can find? Anyway, it’s not your fault, it’s the women’s—they did the leaving. I’ve had it with women. And Barbara isn’t the worst of it.”

Actually, Dale hadn’t been sorry at all, it was merely a polite nothing. Barbara had always been especially nasty to him. He let it pass, and asked George what the worst of it was.

“Allied Pharmaceuticals won’t sell me anything till I pay what I owe them. I got a call from Credit Reconciliation today. That’s going to eat up my entire raise for this month. How can you work in a scummy job like that, anyway?”

“It’s in the blood,” Dale said, replying with his standard answer to that question. He sat carefully on George’s 1973 antique naugahide recliner and thought about what Dad had done.

BY THE time Dale was born it had been pretty well proven that the credit expansion of the previous 100 years had led the nation to a desperate economic plight. What’s more, it was an established truth by that time, even to the government, that the longer the inflationary process went on, the worse the eventual economic collapse was bound to be. Each time the administration tried to stop it the country gave scarier and scarier signs of what was to come. They couldn’t stop it. They were in too deep.

That’s where Dale’s Dad, Jason, came in.

Jason Gillespie, the bald, sour-faced chairman of Brine Lake College’s economics department, was better known for his malevolent sense of humor—of the joy-buzzer-whoopie-cushion variety—than his splashy economic theories, and it was only as a gesture of despair that he was invited to a conference on the state of the economy. The government was about as close as a government ever gets to resigning. Jason brought them an attache case of hope called the Freedom of Trade Act.

The first provision of the Freedom of Trade Act was, of course, immediate and complete control of all prices and wages.

With an inscrutable leer Jason pointed out that things had already got so far out of hand that if they abandoned their inflationary policies the ensuing collapse would be a disaster beyond what anyone was willing to face. Therefore, he said, the only alternative was to expand credit continually and geometrically. Inflation would continue, but in a preplanned, scientific way.

The Freedom of Trade Act abolished all cash money and replaced it with a national credit card issued to everybody, no questions asked, no excuses for refusing accepted. All wages and prices were to be entered into a computer and readjusted according to a complex formula Jason had worked out with frequent reference to his investment portfolio. Then all price setters would have the option of inflating nine percent a month, all wages would automatically be raised ten percent.

To quote the conclusion of Jason’s “Silver Spring Address,” now memorized by every schoolboy, “The collapse may be inevitable, but we have all eternity to put it

off.”

Washington loved it, Dale’s dad became a celebrity, and the Freedom of Trade Act was passed.

George’s voice broke into Dale’s reverie. “Why do we have to go through this whole adjustment hassle, anyway? Why don’t they just transfer the funds automatically? Then we wouldn’t get into situations like this, at least.”

Dale sighed, tired of explaining these simple points to the economically under-educated. “The only effective way to do that would be to dictate what people bought. That’s what they do in Syndicalist Africa. Do you want us to give up our economic freedom?”

“No, I guess not.”

“Besides, almost twenty percent of the work force works for the Bureau. Can you imagine what would happen if they all became suddenly unemployed?”

Secretly, Dale sympathized with George’s feelings, if not with his logic. Something did seem to be wrong with the Bureau. If he hadn’t seen, every day, the figures showing the greater availability of goods and credit to get them with, he would have sworn the country was getting poorer. Dale himself was twenty million dollars behind in his car payments. Sometimes he wondered what he would do if an adjustor in his own office called him up about it.

George wasn’t through with Dale yet. “Anyway, if you know so much about it, why are you still an Adjustor 3? What does your dad think of that, anyway?”

“Dad never wanted me to get into credit. He always said he wanted me to be a juggler. But I could never get past three plates at a time.”

“You’d still have been better off. Do you know where Barbara hid the ludes? Maybe she left them.”

“Not likely, but I’ll go look. I was going to the kitchen anyway.”

He ambled into the kitchen and opened the cardboard door of the Tappan Range Replica, feeling in the upper-left-hand corner for the taped bottle. It was gone. “Sorry, George,” he yelled.

He got out his hotplate and saucepan and heated up some Beefy Vitasoy. It was always the same at the end of the month. He’d run out of money and eat Vitasoy, unable to afford fish protein concentrate. Bea had never seemed to mind, but Sheila always complained and always had enough left on her card to buy real chicken, which she’d eat in front of him. Sheila was no great loss, but he missed her — it took at least four people to keep up the rent on a four-room flat, and he hated to move.

His troubles overwhelmed him. He lost his appetite completely, threw the Vitasoy down the chute, sat down at the table and buried his face in his crossed arms. George had reminded him of something else he needed to fret about — the Bureau. His co-workers were beginning to despise him. He was developing a phobia for the vidphone; whenever he sat before it at six in the morning to call his first debtor of the day, he felt sick to his stomach.

The first symptoms had started when they took the buttons and dials off the vid-phones and installed cranks for direct contact with the operators. The phone company had brought out this improvement with great fanfare, announcing that it would eliminate tie-ups with worn-out switching equipment and put a stop to bad connections. Dale had to admit it was an improvement, but it bothered him.

Then one morning a few months ago he’d cranked through to his first number and got Baby. A chubby neuter face fisheyed into his screen. He suppressed a desire to hang up.

“Is your mother there?” Dale asked.

“Nu furdle glib?” Baby replied.

A voice in the background, female and cranky, said, "We never got formal notification."

Dale felt himself being lifted up in the air — no, not him, the screen — no, not the screen, their phone. He looked past Baby's fat fingers to the street below his debtor's apartment. It was a good ten stories. Baby dropped him, and he weaved crazily at the end of the cord for several minutes, watching the traffic below, before he came to himself and hung up. Since that day he'd had phone problems, and yesterday his boss had noticed.

"Why is it, Gillespie," his boss asked him as he walked down the long row of adjustors' desks toward his own, "that every time I see you sit down at your desk when you come in, it looks like you want to throw up?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, sir," Gillespie answered, sitting down at his desk and turning on the phone. His face turned a pasty white. He quickly clamped his mouth shut and clapped a hand over it.

"Looks to me like you're coming down with a severe case of 'phonophobia.' You know, if you don't make your quota of calls, not even the Adjustors' Union can keep you here. You wouldn't like going on the Basic Credit Ration, would you?"

"No, sir."

"So even though it makes you sick, you'll be sure to make that quota, won't you?"

"It's really not that bad, sir. It passes within the first hour or so."

Dale's boss puffed and blew with apoplectic exasperation, punctuating his sentences with wheezes. "Why the hell don't you get another job? I'll never understand how a man can work at something that makes him sick. Nobody here would miss you much. You must know that."

"It's in the blood," Dale answered lamely.

"I wish to God it were! We could use somebody around here like your father. The last time we had a riot in front of the Bureau building they damn near broke in. What good did it do to raise the inflation base from twenty-seven to thirty-two percent, I ask you. Did any of them appreciate it?" Dale opened his mouth to answer but the boss went on. "No. Our workload is double what it was before. My department has grown so large I can barely manage it. I need a bigger staff.

"But what am I telling you all this for? Do you care? No." The boss' eyes shone wetly. "A creative thinker like your father, that's the kind of help I really need around here. But when was the last time you had a good idea. Or any idea?"

Dale paused before replying to make sure this wasn't another rhetorical question. "I made that suggestion for a new desk arrangement last month, though no one's acted on it yet."

The boss sighed. "That's not exactly what I had in mind."

IT WAS pretty trivial, Dale realized, pulling his head out of his arms and rising from the kitchen table. But why did everyone expect him to be like his father? Wasn't he a separate person? Maybe he wasn't a separate person, in the neo-Jungian sense. *Fear Therapy and Incontinence*, the book which put "tight-assed" back in common usage, had the answers. Flayer had assured him of that. But every time he tried to read it something came up. He rolled the vidphone to the kitchen table and, suppressing an attack of nausea, cranked up the operator and gave his shrink's number.

Only five minutes passed before Flayer's image flashed onto the screen, a scowl in an aureole of grizzled, frizzy hair above a t-shirt. He growled and flexed giant muscles. "Gillespie, what are you calling me at home for? I'm going to come over

there and beat the piss out of you, do you understand that?" He smirked. "Not right away, of course, but sometime when you're not expecting it."

"Listen," said Dale, "I'm really going to kill myself if I don't get Bea back somehow. I can't stand it." Dale gasped in surprise. He hadn't intended to bring up Bea at all — it had just come out. The Fear Therapy must be working.

"You think I give a shit? I got a waiting list a mile long. I don't need your money." Dale noticed, nonetheless, his hand instinctively clutching the *netsuke* holding his credit card pouch. "Now, what's this about Beatrice?" Flayer asked.

"I love her. I want her back. I need your advice."

"Why aren't you babbling about your father, as usual?"

"This is serious, Horace."

"I don't suppose you've thought of anything as simple as wooing her back."

"Well, of course I thought of it. But that wouldn't work."

"You're hopeless, Gillespie. Have you ever thought that you might be better off if you gave up women entirely?" Flayer snatched a saber from the weapons rack behind him, stabbed it into a magazine out of arm's reach, and waved it at the screen. "Look, I know just the thing for you. I was reading about it in last month's *Journal of South African Alienism*. I'll start you on this new program. Homosexual Therapy, they call it. We'll begin with wrist-loosening exercises and elementary Oedipalism, and then . . ."

"It really doesn't sound like my sort of thing, thanks anyway."

Flayer's face fell. "You're a stick-in-the-mud, Gillespie. The only thing left for you to do now is to go talk to Beatrice. She'll probably spit in your face, but . . ."

"You're right. That's what I'll do."

"Huh?"

"You've motivated me. Thank you."

"What about Homosexual Therapy?"

"Have you met George? He was just saying a little while ago that he was sick of women."

"What?"

"George! Come into the kitchen and talk to my shrink. I think he's got the answer to your problem."

George stumbled into the kitchen. Dale sat him in front of the screen and made the introductions. He put on his coat and walked to the back door. "What's your credit rating, George?" he heard Flayer ask.

"It's as good as anybody's. Why?"

Dale closed the door softly behind him and sighed with relief when he saw that they hadn't yet towed his car away.

HUNCHED OVER the wheel of his five-foot long Plymouth two seater, Dale listened to the radio news. The government had raised the monthly wage increase to thirty-two percent starting tomorrow, the first of the month. Price increases would be held to twenty percent till the month after. That ought to put Beatrice into a more receptive mood. And even if he couldn't persuade her to come back, it would help with next month's rent.

Listening to the rest of the news, he learned that the new raise infuriated the Minus Twenty Lobby, a group which claimed the vested interests of the twenty percent employed by the Bureau of Credit Reconciliation had locked the country into a suicidal economic course, and proposed to disenfranchise them. They were even now marching through Washington. Meanwhile, a recent study by the President's Board of Economic Advisors proved conclusively that the country had never been more prosperous.

An in-depth told him this was only the first of many raises in the percentage to come. The legislature had decided that the way out of the current, inexplicable recession was to increase the increase itself, at a rate of ten percent a month, keeping wages always ahead of prices. It seemed to Dale, vaguely, that there was something wrong with this approach, and his face wrinkled with worry as he tried to think about it, but he was already pulling into the parking lot of the bar where Bea worked. He opened the car roof and stepped out.

BEA HAD gone back to her family, more or less: to her eight brothers who ran a restaurant and bar near the new university. There were no empty tables, so Dale couldn't follow his natural inclination to sit alone and look pitiable. Skillfully avoiding a platoon of Guru Algernon Yogi snot-eaters aggressively distributing their religious magazine, *Ambrosia*, he found his way to a centrally located table and sat across from a young man with a computer printout sheet and a book. The young man kept looking rapidly from sheet to book and back.

Pale eyes looked out of a sallow blond face. "I'm using a random number printout to consult the *I Ching*. It's the best way." This pronouncement seemed intended to forstall conversation. The eyes returned to the book. Dale was looking around for a waitress, preferably Beatrice, when one of her brothers, Lorenzo, sat beside him. He was carrying two beers.

"Have a beer, bud," Lorenzo said. "I got this stuff out of the back cooler. It's made from barley. Nothing but the best for my ex-brother-in-law, right?"

"Hello, Lorenzo." Dale sipped appreciatively. Rice beer was all they made these days.

"Hear the news? People around here are pretty mad about it, let me tell you."

"Mad at a wage increase?"

"It's only gonna make things worse. Why can't you get nothing but rice beer any more? Cause every month the breweries make less in proportion to what they pay out. If they didn't make their beer chintzier every month, they'd be out of business by now. And it even costs money to scale down to a crappier product. It's like that with everything. We'll be living in paper houses before long, mark my words. But you're in Credit, you already know all that."

"Yes, well . . ."

"And even though people know everything's going to wear out faster, they can't predict how fast. So they wind up in debt worse than ever. Me too. And what are you doing here tonight? Looking for a good time?"

"Is Bea here tonight?"

Lorenzo shook his head pityingly. "Yeah, but you're not going to have a very good time with her. Don't you know she's fed up with you? She moved out on you, or haven't you heard?"

"I want to talk with her anyway, if she'll see me."

"Let's go beat up a couple of Algies instead." Lorenzo lowered his voice. "I got some rolls of quarters from the old days."

"Lorenzo, will she see me or not?"

"Sure, she'll see you. But why bother? You know, I've heard just lately of a good thing for you, with all your woman trouble. I was reading about it in the *Journal of South African Alienism*. Homosexual Therapy, it's called . . ."

"I've heard of it."

"Oh, you read that *Journal* too? To tell you the truth, I only subscribe for the dirty pictures."

"This doesn't make any sense!" the sallow-faced youth across the table said,

teeth gritted.

"What's that, bud?" Lorenzo asked.

"I keep getting the hexagram for the army."

"Oh, the *I Ching*. What you asking it about?"

"What effect the new pay-raise bill is going to have."

"Maybe the *I Ching* thinks that's a silly question," Dale ventured.

"Nah. His problem is he's just going straight down the list. He should close his eyes and poke at the printout with a pen, and pick his random numbers randomly. It's the only way." Lorenzo rose from the table and walked toward the bar saying, "See you later, bud," Dale wasn't sure to whom.

As soon as her brother had left, Beatrice sat in his place, two beers in hand, her Italian pulchritude twisting Dale's heart. "Hi, Dale," she said, "what brings you here? Have a beer."

"Don't you know what brought me here?"

"I have my fears."

"Why do you have to be like that, Bea? I miss you."

She ruffled his hair affectionately. "I know. I miss you, too."

"Then you'll come back?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"We've already been through this. Living with you was driving me bananas."

"You're right," Dale said bitterly. "I am depressing to be around. But I can't help it. Horace Flayer says . . ."

"I don't think that Fear Therapy business is doing you any good. Pain Therapy seemed to help more, even if you were a little stiff in the evenings. You know, I was reading about this new Therapy in the *Journal of South African Alienism* where . . ."

"Listen, Bea," Dale said in desperation, "isn't there anything I can do to make you want to come back?"

"Like I said, you can cheer up."

"Oh, my God!"

"You used to be fun, before you started fretting about your father all the time . . ."

"I never even think of my father!"

"Yes, you do. Probably Horace Flayer's fault. But now it seems like you're trapped in it. You've got this thing where you're never going to be happy until you make it big like daddy." She smiled again and patted his knee. "Ok. Do it. Become a success."

"That's easy for you to say."

"Maybe, but I know you're always going to be misery to be around if you don't. I hate to sound so cold and blunt, but until you do something that at least makes you start thinking you've made the big time, I won't come back." She kissed him lightly.

"A refreshingly mature decision," said the *I Ching* student.

"Oh, hi Frank," said Bea. "When did you make the switch from Numerology?"

"I didn't exactly switch. This is merely an extension, an expansion, as it were, of principles which . . ."

Dale spent the next half-hour listening to Fred discourse on the history of the *I Ching* and his theory of it, which was that it was "manifestation of the order of the universe which is expressed in its apparent chaos." Then he spoke, even longer, of the various applications of random number series, swelling with high emotion on the wonderfulness of aleatory computer music, and finally of its use in reading the *I Ching*.

"The best part about using random number printouts," Fred said, "is the absence of human control. Coin tossing, of course, is beneath contempt, but even the configuration of tossed stalks can be subconsciously influenced. The printouts

eliminate . . .”

“Hold it!” Dale said excitedly.

Bea scowled at Dale.

“No, Bea, this is important. I’ve had an idea. A big idea.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t think I want to tell you until I talk to my father about it.”

“Your father? You haven’t spoken to him in years.” Bea’s eyes widened. “You’re getting better, Dale.”

Dale was encouraged. “I’m going to call him tonight. Can I use your phone?”

“Sure. It’s in the back.”

Dale got up. “Do you have any milk of magnesia?”

JASON GILLESPIE was in his workshop, upholstering an easy chair. “Dale! Long time no see.”

“Hi, Dad.”

“Wanna see my new invention?” Jason held up some small, soft plastic bubbles and a vial of fluid. “These bubbles pad the chair. They’re filled with the gunk in this vial, which is very volatile. What it is, is these bubbles are semipermeable—they allow the vapor to escape very slowly when pressure is applied — like the pressure of someone sitting in the chair. So when they sit in it, the smell of this gunk will exude very slowly, so slowly that their nose will adjust to it without ever suspecting. But when they get up after about an hour, they’ll smell like bat shit for the rest of the day.” The old man laughed scratchily.

“What do you think of the state of the economy, Dad?”

“Ah!” His father stuck his face in the screen belligerently. “You call me to shame me, eh? It won’t work. The time for my ideas has simply run out, that’s all. They were all right for their time, but now it’s time for someone with a new idea to come along. Of course, there doesn’t seem to be anyone like that around. Too bad.” He paused ruminatively for a few seconds, then grinned. “Not that I really give a shit. I’m eighty-two years old and rich. Why should I care?”

“I’m glad you feel that way, Dad, because *I* have the idea.”

“I’m not interested,” Jason said grumpily.

“Dad, have I ever asked you for anything?”

“Not for about twenty years. That’s because you finally learned that I won’t give it to you.”

“I want you to use your influence to get me a hearing with the Secretary of Finance. He’s an old buddy of yours.”

“Hell, I got him his job. But economics bores me, son. You know, the best thing the Freedom of Trade Act did for me was to allow me to coast on my reputation from then on, so I didn’t have to think about that crap any more.”

“Can you understand that I might want a reputation to coast on, too? All you have to do is get a hearing with the Secretary and the Director of my bureau and let me ride in on your coattails. Once I’m there, I’ll do all the talking.”

“You gave me a good reason, but is it a good enough reason to let you make a laughing-stock out of me?”

“You’re eighty-two and rich. Why should you care?”

“Good point.”

“Besides, once I get to talk with them, I’m sure they’ll be impressed with idea.”

“Ok,” Jason sighed, “let’s hear it.”

“Oh . . . and there’s a young lady I’ll want to invite along, too.”

“Figures. Now tell me.”

Dale told him.

ONCE DALE'S dad started the wheels moving, things went fast. Dale's boss was amazed when Dale received a fat salary increase and an impressive title (Director of Debt Research) through Jason's buddies in the Bureau so, Jason said, "The Secretary won't feel obliged to be embarrassed to listen to you." The title was also sufficient indication of change to make the job of persuading Beatrice to come along an easy one.

A few days later he, Bea, and his father were flown to Washington and escorted, by police, to the Department of Finance and Weather. (Several departments had recently been combined, reducing the number of cabinet posts to thirty-nine.)

Washington was a mess, plagued by continual rioting and burning, according to the cops escorting them. "That sounds good," observed Jason. "They should be desperate enough to listen to anything."

They were met in a large office by dozens of officials seated on rows of folding chairs. All were grim-faced and nervous, the Secretary and the Bureau Director most of all. Jason made a brief speech to the effect that the last time they were in trouble they had the good sense to listen to him, but now times had changed and bold new steps had to be taken, and that once again they were going to have their thinking revolutionized by a Gillespie. Then he guided Bea to a couple of unoccupied chairs in the back of the office, sat beside her, and watched Dale expectantly.

Dale began nervously, quoting Fred's speech on the virtues of random numbers almost verbatim until he noticed several scowls in the midst of his discourse on aleatory music.

"More to the point," Dale continued, "it seems that computers can be programmed to do all kinds of things with random numbers. My proposal, to put it succinctly, is that the computer already in use here be programmed to determine our economic policy randomly."

He held up his hand to ward off protests. "What is the chief source of our troubles? Every month our houses are more flimsily built, our food grows shorter, because the producer's credit income constantly falls behind output. It seems to me that the problem lies in the fact that, under the present system, people can anticipate what's going to happen in the future.

"They know exactly how much prices are going to rise in relation to wages, and they can determine fairly accurately how much they'll be getting in real terms for a certain amount of work today, and how much tomorrow, and they can compare it.

"So they do less, and do it more haphazardly. They need incentive. All those who have dropped out and gone on the Basic Credit Ration obviously need incentive. And, as Horace Flayer conclusively demonstrated in his book, *Fear Therapy and Incontinence*," (the assembled nodded recognition of this groundbreaking work) "man's most important motivator is fear."

The Secretary and the Director nodded slowly. They began to perk up. The Secretary's back straightened and he started taking hurried notes.

"With the computer programmed as I suggest, the danger of human control will be totally eliminated. No one will be able to anticipate anything. One month prices will go up and wages down, the next month the inverse, and next month both might rise a thousand percent. Who knows? Fear will bring the work ethic back into American Life."

"Bravo!" a couple voices sounded. There was scattered applause. They were coming around.

The Secretary looked up from his notes. "But if we can't anticipate wage changes, won't this increase the debt problem of the Bureau of Credit Reconciliation considerably?" he asked shrewdly.

"Of course!" Dale exclaimed eagerly. "That's one of the beauties of the plan. The Bureau will have to expand its staff by at least fifty percent. The unemployment problem will be solved in one stroke!"

"It makes good sense to me," the Bureau Director said decisively. The Secretary nodded his agreement.

Beatrice's face was filled with awe and relief. She relaxed and leaned back in her chair, producing a loud blast from the whoopee-cushion beneath her.

"That's my boy!" said Jason. ●

Ray Brown

Not much has changed since the bio I sent you to accompany "Prosthesis" appeared. I discovered that Romanian cabernet sauvignon (at \$2.65 a bottle!) makes an excellent Bordeaux substitute if the wine hasn't vinegarized because of the dry cork. At that price it's well worth the risk of an occasional bad bottle. THIS NEWS IS FOR AMAZING READERS ONLY. DON'T SPREAD IT AROUND.

The biggest change in my life is that the sale of "Prosthesis" inspired me to write more fiction, more or less SF. I got a new typewriter that writes SF novels—just sent

its first novel off today, in fact. It's called *The Hybrid*.

As a consequence of all this prose, I write less music. But "classical" music is even less remunerative than science fiction.

I have a bear named Cheryl.

Why we chose this story

Timely, biting sarcasm here, and just the kind of solutions that seem to be happening with our boys in D.C. Right on. Alas.

Genesis I

Barely into Capricorn
I broke the orbit
and was born.
A god's limp finger hung
from my guts.
I must have flung
the umbilical
to the stars.
I cannot recall
the other.
She should have wept.
Let it be so.
I had a map
of sorts
and had no choice
except to learn
a voice
inside me churned
like Venus passing.
The inherent word loomed,
took form. A wing
emerged, a tail.
A fuselage, sleek
as Bennett's parabolic.

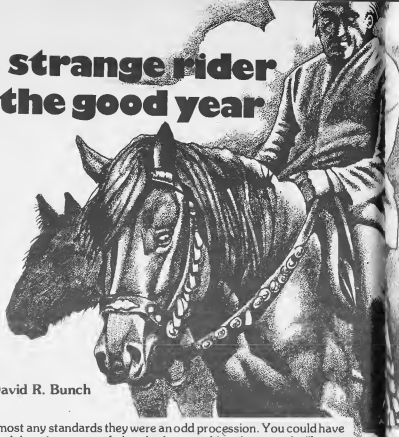
Bird or brain,
the image careened,
skies fell, worlds gaped,
and I knew
the word, the word.

Genesis II

Whence came I I forgot. But the time
I pissed bare in ashes & climbed trees
was a good life except bad bees
fired honeypot & deadly as quicklime
stung me lots & friends, and mine
swelled, burst, corpuscular sneeze
& convulsions, then much ease,
rest, deep sleep & dreams divine.

Womb & wallow, mom's lap dog,
me. Till apes outaped I took to dark
woods & ways. Help, Lord, I cried & bled,
make mine wholly thy log,
thy hearth, thy stark
fool to feed thy fire, thy bed.

the strange rider of the good year



by David R. Bunch

By almost any standards they were an odd procession. You could have judged them in any one of a hundred or so unbiased ways and still come up with the same decision: strange, odd. — I first saw them on a hill between me and a cold-gold sunset, four black lumps moving smartly off the rise. And a steady wind that moaned through the tight dark pines was storming at my ears, almost enough to make me dizzy. It was in the fall, late — in November, as I remember, when I was recovering from an illness.

They were singing a song. Or he was singing a song. But it seemed what he did they all did. For they were a tight little group; they kept well formed, and wherever they had traveled or had lived — well, you knew somehow that they had done it together. And he had led them. The song? It was not really a song, as I remember, not a song with words, but there was a moan from him, a high-pitched eerie screech, and a little easing off as of agony going away to some great celebration of rest, or of triumph, even as they rode on in. Or as he rode on in. Let us be truthful — only he was riding.

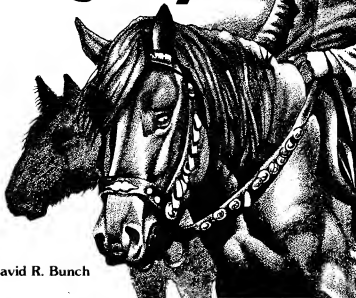
I thought they were going to slide on down the grade — just hightail it into the distance while my eyes watching them glimmered — and leave me there unbothered, leaned up against my shack in that small-burg town. And to be right truthful, I would have preferred it that way, for I am something of a hermit, if you must know it, since I sold out my land and my buildings and moved to this small-dump place to wait for — well, let's not gild it — to wait for death. But whenever it's forced on me, I try to be the social one, and friendly. I try to do the right things. But it gets easier and easier as the years roll by to just back against a wall here in this twilight of memory and the big plains I once crossed and the burned-over chances. And anyway, here in the badlands of ninety, I'm so old it's some-



Illustrated by Gary Freeman

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the strange rider of the good year



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times hard for me to tell whether I'm getting a visit or a visitation. So I would have been perfectly willing just to let them ride on by.

But he wanted to announce something. I saw that right at once. Oh no, he wasn't going to ride on by, just hightail it into the distance and leave me to my fantasies with tired old bones leaned back against a wall. Oh no. He had to reopen discussion. He reined up with a flourish. Naturally, I expected the flourish. You can tell when they are in a flourish mood by the way they ride, all tense seeming, bent forward and urgent as they spur. But I didn't expect the music; I didn't expect the little heavy silver bells all up and down the bridle reins. I didn't expect the inlay work on the tapaderos either, if you want to know it. My eyes blinked hard in the cold haze at what I saw. I drew my coat tight to me in the chill. "Howdy."

I raised my hand for a little half-hitch wave-down of greeting, to let him know I wouldn't fight if he didn't force it; I fixed my face as neutral as I could to help him feel that a chance of friendliness was not yet wholly dried dead in the frozen worlds of me and time. "Howdy," I replied, "where headed, Stranger?"

"Like the song says," he said. "Did you hear my song?"

I nodded just slightly. "Heard something. I wouldn't call it a song. Sounded more like the death screech of a dying hoot owl to me." Then I surprised myself and him by exploding in great laughter that doubled me all up and probably sent my face all fiery reddened by mirth spasms. Somehow, living here all alone, I've got so lonely I can hardly stand my own fun, especially when I get a chance to try it out on a stranger. But I soon saw he failed to comprehend my point, so I straightened up. After all, he was company, so I had no right to make jokes too smooth for his comprehension. "It was a good song," I said.

"The best song you'll ever hear in this world," he said. "Especially the last part. You got that note at the last, I hope."

"Got it." And somehow and suddenly I wanted to laugh like crazy again, but I remembered my manners and straightened, calm as ice. To tell you the truth, it had all sounded more moan and screech to me than music, even that part at the last, which was a little less screech. "At the last you seem to ease off in agony," I elaborated. "You don't scream so."

His smile was a cavern of pink and red through the stubble on his sunken ruined, strangely-white face. I saw he had no teeth at all, none, unless a couple or so were hiding 'way 'way back that I couldn't see in the poor light, and I was looking up right into his smile. Looked just like I would have, I thought, some years back when I used to ride in to the places of the big mirrors in the towns — the barrooms — and eye the bar-girls. "That tells the story," he said, "good part of the story, but perhaps short. The other, long part — did you hear it?"

"Heard something — like a long steady wind blowing through thick dead pines. Ever hear that?"

He nodded, terse. "Heard it. And that about describes it, although I'd never thought of it in quite that way. Not until just now. Thanks, stranger."

Then I remembered my manners. "Light off," I said. "Get down, chair a spell and rest your saddle." But there wasn't a second chair out here on this porch where I often sit to take the air and watch sunsets, even in the coldest weather — so he'd have to sit on his haunches. And I don't have to tell you I almost exploded again at that kind of wit.

He didn't take my bait. He wagged a negative shake to my suggestion that he light off and try his haunches to rest his saddle. "I'll stay up," he said. "Sometimes, to tell you the truth, when I get down, it's a question." And all at once, looking at him so indistinct there in the dusk-falling haze, I realized for the first time that he was very old. Not so old as I am, naturally, but old. "I'm sorry," I

said instinctively and truly, "sorry. Got far to ride?"

"Well, I hope," he answered me. "Because I'm enjoying this one. This, like the song says, is the pay-off. The triumph. Me and Spot and Rover and this big stallion and little Jenny Ears are going into Town. And we're not coming back." My eyes popped some and my breath fluttered a little concerning that part about the big stallion. I'd never in all my days had enough ahead to own a stallion, so naturally I doubted that he had, or that anyone had in these regions. I saw that the horse for all his fancy accouterments, even the heavy thick little bells, was a mangy scrub, big-boned, but somewhat less than massive, from want of nourishment and care. And shifting my gaze around, peering through the murk, I couldn't see that he was a stallion at all, either. The eyes didn't look like it, for one thing. For some reason I got the idea this old gelding's eyes looked just about like mine — pretty beat out and dormant from a long road all traveled away and left far back. And if the opportunities arose to fertilize any number of new and passionate chances, neither one of us would do very much about it. I felt quite sure of that.

The dogs, Spot and Rover, I could comprehend. They might have been Towser and Fido, or any two of a couple or three dozen dogs I myself had owned in my time. Their collars I could see were pretty well made up, with silver work and gold-colored studs and pieces of carved twinkling glass catching the last lights of the day. The rider had two fancy dog leashes dangling loosely from the saddle horn, though I seriously doubted that these big rough-haired mongrels had ever been on a lead in all their natural lives. If so, I could just see these rebels not walking primly on the line, but being dragged along on their rear ends and fighting all the time to get free of the string.

As for the Jenny, little Jenny Ears, as he had called her — well, she was just a scrawny, skimpy little old burro with a fancy purple blanket strapped, with silvered and jeweled straps, to her gulfed back and sides. But I guess he knew what he was doing, this old rider.

"Good crops?" I said. "Oil? Or did you find the bonanza?"

"Going into Town," he said, "and we're not coming back. Had that big year. The Good Year." But he didn't seem to wish to be specific just now what had made the Good Year good. His thoughts were going another groove and he played them out in a drone. Sometimes I almost lost him in the wind's buzz, but I swear I heard him say these things: "I'm going to buy new silvered boots for me and fancy up my horse and little Jenny Ears. And don't forget the dogs. We're pretty fancy now from the stuff I had mailed in, but we can do better. The dogs I think might like some red sweaters for the cold. And I've heard of little leather sacks you put on dogs' feet, a kind of shoes. Well, old Spot and Rover are going to have, you can bet, the very best before it snows. And we'll just lounge in Town. I'll sing my song, mostly the last part now, and spit on the gold street and pay my fine for spitting on the street if, and whenever, I get caught. The dogs will have the best of T-bone steaks out of gold-flashing pans. They're just about finished with bread scraps and rabbit bones. They stayed with me out there when the going was a real rough show. For little Jenny Ears I'm hoping for a stall with hay as soft to lie on as a velvet rug. And for this big fine old stallion — well, I hope we may find some mares." As you may no doubt know I almost exploded, that he thought this bag-o'-bones nag would have any use at this late year for mares. Rich and crazy, I could not help thinking.

"About this Good Year," I found myself reasking, "did a government project buy your land for a dam? Or did you sell timber? A while big log-jam full of timber, I'll bet." And then I laughed.

He eyed me with a stubborn moveless eye. And I became alarmed at the way

he was starting to fade and look indistinct and far away to me. So I rubbed my fading sight and tried to polish him shiny again, or, at any rate, distinct. "About all I want from you, stranger," he said somewhat shortly after awhile, "is a little information. And companionship. Could you tell me how far to the Town? And come with me."

Really alarmed now, I waved my hands about. "This is a town," I said. "At least they call it that — a wide place in the road, mostly. What town were you after?"

His answer I couldn't hear, if he made one. His look was cold and tight, and distant, as he shook reins for the starting. Listening hard, I heard the dogs' feet going on a firm smooth road for a long time, that little scratches-scratch sound moving away. And on top of that were the *clap-clap-clap* of the big-boned nobby horse, the tinkle of all those bells and the small *rap-rap-rap* of the burro. And over and above everything, seeming to hold it in one close-knit pat formation, was the rider's song, mostly the ending now, and the wind coming colder and harder through the pines.

As I huddled back against the wall, I felt all chill and used up. I was glad for his Good Year, I guessed, although this Stranger had never quite succeeded in making it plain to me what had happened, why it was so good. But there wasn't any question that I was glad he was gone without insisting I go along, without putting me to the small irritating unkindness, the altogether demoralizing experience of refusing to saddle up and ride with him. I wasn't feeling quite ready or strong enough yet for that ride; I hadn't had a Good Year, so far as I knew or remembered. And besides at the very last this Stranger, this odd-ball rider with his odd-ball troupe, had revealed that he was more than a little in doubt himself concerning the distance to this town, or indeed even its location. ●

David R. Bunch

Some thoughts and a poem from David R. Bunch, writer of many stories and poems — 60 or so of which have appeared in *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. Our most recent presentation of his fiction was "New Member" in the July, 1980 *Fantastic*.

"Rejections are BAD — real downers. Acceptances are uplift stuff! Momentary solid joys. But eventually only transitory, ephemeral and scurrying-away things. We do what we can, finally throwing ourselves on the mercy of the editorial court, and, if accepted there, hoping for (later) an intelligent reader jury. It's a chancy, demoniacal world at best, fraught with snarls and bites, and lines and heads tumbling butchered that were intact just minutes ago all waving and laughing . . ."

Why we chose this story

Bunch's very special way with words and imagery sets him apart — he is unique. Those fascinated with wordsmanship and ideas will always savor a piece by this poetic writer. Like a very fine wine, he takes some time getting used to — to educate your taste as it were. But the process is very much worth it.

STEEL-WALKING NIGHTMARE

He stood tall, bulge-eyed,
with a glance that was sharp and had sheen
like the glimmer that sheet steel makes
in the sun. His ears flung back, wide,
like wings that could carry his head,
and his mouth, half beak and half snout,
made me think of a chimney
as he nursed at a smoke's stub end.
His hands, reaching, fingered rake teeth
through the mat of his thick steel hair,
and he drew a small silvered chain
from the cleft that his neck hinged in;
a coil came loose on the heart side
and kicked through his tin breast then
while he laughed full and high, unperturbed.
Then he bent to his walkers-in-space
and fixed at a lace in his gear
before he untangled a cable
and straightened some fine steel wire.
Ready, he rose on a fin-wade
stepping that splashed the air
until he had walked so high
and so wide that I see him
now! EVERYWHERE!

— David R. Bunch

IN LOOKING back on it all, I suppose the biggest hassle of my "experience" was dealing with my insurance adjustor. That, and filling out a myriad of government forms. Of course, reporters were very interested in my case also, but who could blame them? It's not every day that someone returns from the dead!

Shortly after my revival was confirmed, the United States Office of Parapsychic Phenomena (OPP) stepped in, and its director, Jon Chapel, suggested that I hold a news conference. I protested at first, not caring to be the World Network's lead story, and preferring that my name stay out of the *International Press*. It wasn't so much publicity that I feared, but rather the chance that worldwide holovision would make me into a freak. Chapel was adamant, though, and he finally convinced me by saying that the public is more suspicious when it isn't informed. I was briefed on what I could and could not say, and Chapel scheduled the conference for the next day at noon, and had his secretary inform the media.

After a restless night, I spent the morning with Norman Gilbert, the agent who had sold me my life insurance policy—before I died, of course. It was not a pleasant prelude to the dreaded news conference.

"Tony," he said, in an inflection designed to show the hopelessness of it all, "Either you are dead or you aren't. The living can't collect on this policy; neither can the almost dead, the partially dead, or the formerly dead. Granted, I don't know all the facts. But since you are sitting across from me, and since you are very much alive, I can only assume that reports of your death were, as they say, greatly exaggerated."

He sat there and stared at me, his pregnant pause obligating me to offer some kind of an answer. I tried to think of one, but what could I say? I was as confused as he was. Finally, I decided to shift the topic away from my state of being.

"Norm, if I could, I'd return the entire adjustment, but you know as well as I do that I didn't collect personally. I was *dead* at the time; I don't even know what papers were signed, or how much the adjustment came to, or anything. Liz handled all that, and now she's heaven-knows-where, and I don't blame her for staying there. She must be scared to death by all this."

"I'll accept the premise that your wife has the money, which amounts to almost a hundred grand, by the way, but that doesn't change the fact that the Home Office thinks you and she are pulling off a fraud. Naturally, I don't believe that."

I knew he had thrown that last comment in for my benefit only, and he knew that I knew.

"Look at it this way, Norm. What would you do if you were a woman and your husband died, and was buried, and you collected on the life insurance policy, and then he turned up alive again? You'd run, like she did. Who knows—she may have already spent the money; she may have remarried."

"In a month?"

"Stranger things have happened."

A Stitch in Time

"I'll say. This whole incident is a 'stranger thing.'" Gilbert looked flustered. I decided to put him off, and get ready for the news conference.

"Look Norm, the government wants me to meet with reporters in a little while over at the Government Center where the OPP office is located. Why don't you let me get that over with, and I'll meet with you later in the week?" I was hoping he'd take the hint, and leave.

"Tell you what," he said as though making a great concession. "Suppose I give you until the end of this government investigation to come up with the money. I can keep in touch with you from time to time, and if you start to piece this thing together . . ." He stopped in mid-sentence realizing that for the first time he had admitted that there might be an answer to all this besides a gigantic fraud.

"All right, Norm, I'll agree to that. If OPP draws a blank, I'll do my best to pay you back."

Gilbert leaned back in his chair, and looked somewhat relieved. "Don't forget that Star Farms Insurance has a fine staff of investigators. If you come across something that might bear some checking into . . ."

"I'll tell Jon Chapel at OPP. My orders are to keep my mouth shut except in government-chaperoned news conferences."

"In that case, I may have a visit with Mr. Chapel myself," he said rising. "If you should get a lead on the whereabouts of your wife, I hope that won't be classified information."

I didn't answer as I saw him to the door.

"I'll be in touch, Tony. And it's good to have you back. Or whatever . . ."

I closed the door behind him, and then changed into a suit for my date with the holo-cameras.

JON CHAPEL was the kind of man who commanded attention. He was extremely professional-looking in his pin-stripe suit, his thick black beard and his glasses. As he ushered me into the meeting room, the reporters and onlookers readied their cameras, recorders, and notebooks. We took our places behind a table, and soundmen immediately were strapping lavalier discs around both our necks. They were cordless, but made me uncomfortable just the same.

"Many of you have asked about the Sutton case," Chapel began all of a sudden. "Today, we're going to explain as much as we can to you, because we feel the public has a right to know." Holo-cameras were grinding. "Most of you have already learned that Tony Sutton was killed in a solar-bus accident on January 3rd. On January 31st, Mr. Sutton turned up alive, and apparently well. Not knowing how to cope with the situation, he came to our office to ask for assistance. We made positive verification of Mr. Sutton's identity through his brain wave prints, which are, of course, handled through the FBI."

As I listened to Chapel's opening remarks, I was carefully scanning the crowd, and I immediately recognized Chuck Storer of the World Network. Who wouldn't? He was top rated. I also recognized reporters from two smaller holo-vision networks and noticed that the five audio services were represented, as was the *International Press*. I was getting nervous. I sneaked a peek at Chapel, who was stroking his beard as he continued:

"To head off one question, we *did* exhume Mr. Sutton's body, and performed an autopsy. As paradoxical as it seems, the embalmed body of Tony Sutton is identical in every way to the man sitting beside me today, all the way down to the fingerprints. The only difference is, one body is alive; one is a corpse."

Someone walked in. It was Norm Gilbert. I was disgusted, but at least my nerves were settling down. Chapel was concluding his speech.

"OPP has obtained grant money to launch a full investigation into the matter, and that probe is underway currently. And now, ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce Anthony Armstrong Sutton, who will field your questions."

Storer was not number one for nothing. He was quick to take command of the meeting, and the other reporters seemed to be used to it.

"Mr. Sutton, a month's time elapsed before your so-called revival. Do you have any memories at all during that time?"

I cleared my throat, and assumed my best pose for the holo-cameras. "None whatsoever, Mr. Storer. It's as though I were asleep for twenty-eight days, then awoke as though nothing at all had happened. I noticed some changes at the house, for example, most of my things had been moved out, and that was my first indication that something was wrong. A calendar confirmed my fears."

"What happened after you realized that almost a month was missing from your life?"

"I called my wife Liz at the office where she worked. She was shocked to hear my voice, as you might imagine. I wasn't able to learn much from her, except that I was supposed to be dead. Then, she disappeared."

One of the other reporters managed a question. "At that time, did you believe the story about your death?"

"What could I believe? I certainly had not gone through the normal de-freezing process for suspended animation patients. I didn't believe in Rip Van Winkle. So I checked with the head of the advertising agency where I work. He, too, was flabbergasted, but I managed to learn the date of my death."

Gilbert was taking it all in. I occasionally stared at him as the questioning continued.

"Is that when you called OPP?"

"No, first I went to the library, and checked back issues of the *International Press*. I found my own obituary. The whole thing seemed impossible to me, but by that time, I was beginning to believe it."

Patrick Flynn, who I remembered as the reporter who had written the article on my demise, raised his hand, and asked a question.

"It's my understanding that you tried several agencies before calling Mr. Chapel. Didn't any of them listen?"

"None at all. I was dismissed as a crazy person, so I came to OPP. I didn't know whether I was parapsychic or not, but I figured I qualified as a phenomenon."

I gestured at another newsman, and he stood and asked Chapel a question.

"Mr. Chapel, I'm Jules Hardman, the science editor at the *I.P.* Have you considered the possibility that the current Anthony Sutton might be a clone?"

Gilbert loved that one. Damn him. If I were a clone, what a way to perpetrate insurance fraud. Of course, that could mean Liz might be accused of murdering my original body. I didn't want to believe that, but even if it were true, how did she manage to replenish my memories so quickly? Chapel put my mind at ease.

"Mr. Hardman, all cloning is under direct government supervision at this time, and there are strict laws against any unauthorized use of the process. As a science writer, I'm sure you know the problems in duplicating the mental processes as exactly as the body itself. It's my opinion that Mr. Sutton here is much too advanced mentally to be a clone."

In spite of the cameras, I smirked at Gilbert.

The conference lasted a full forty-five minutes, during which all kinds of weird theories were advanced. Parallel worlds, other dimensions, vibratory planes, space warps—could I really be involved in all that? Jon Chapel methodically discounted those theories, to the point that I couldn't tell if he was being a good

scientist or a good bureaucrat. At last, the media meet was over; Chapel told me I did just fine; and I went home to try and relieve the tension.

SIX O'CLOCK found me in front of the holovision set trying to get the contraption tuned in for the evening news. The depth control seemed to be out of whack—made me wish for an old style television—but after a few minutes of adjustments, I managed to get an acceptable graph. I decided to watch the World Network channel first, to see how Chuck Storer would treat the story, then flip flop to the secondary network affiliates. The story came on just after an Inter-Bank commercial for Handy-Pay Credit, which reminded me of another problem I had so far failed to consider. I dismissed Handy-Pay from my mind entirely when the newscast flashed on.

"Some new information was revealed today in the case of Anthony Armstrong Sutton, the man who is both living and dead at the same time," said Storer's holographic image. "I met with Sutton and with Jon Chapel of the Office of Parapsychic Phenomena this afternoon at the Government Center." Storer was making it sound as if he had been the only reporter present at the news conference. He couldn't fool me, though; we advertising folks know something about shaping a viewing audience's opinions. (Storer, you'll recall is number one.)

The studio graph faded, and dissolved into a mini-graph of the OPP meeting room. Chapel was on camera doing his little background speech, and while his voice continued, the scene cut to Storer taking notes on a small pad. Again, I couldn't help but notice the care given to creating the illusion that Storer was the only newsman on hand. They used a clip of me explaining my revival as best I could (luckily, they edited out the part where I cleared my throat), and they continued with Storer's question about the month missing from my life. When they threw it back to Storer in the main studio, I changed channels.

The North American News Network was running a bit on shuttle service to the moon and back and how much the new added routes would cost taxpayers. The religious channel had a duo of muppets reading news to children, but they weren't doing my story. As I reversed the channel selector to locate the European News Service, I suddenly froze on the World Network once again.

Norman Gilbert! There he was, live in the studio with Chuck Storer, talking to beat the band about my insurance problems and the search for my missing wife. I forced myself to watch, and then made a mental note to be sure and punch out Gilbert the next time I saw him. As if I didn't have enough trouble...

So now I was a world-wide personality, but that didn't put food on the table. I remembered the Inter-Bank spot, and decided to phone the Agency and see if I could go to work again while OPP continued their checking.

THE OFFICE hadn't changed much; of course, I had only been gone a month. I sat down at my desk, and pulled the file on Inter-Bank. I was proud of that account, and the way Handy-Pay Credit had caught on. The name "Handy-Pay" was the gimmick, of course, for a credit system where the palm print is used for identification and billing purposes instead of a plastic card. I was putting the Inter-Bank file back in its place when Jerry Epstein, my boss, walked in.

"Welcome back, Tony," he said as he pulled up a chair.

"It's nice to be back. For awhile, I was afraid you might wait out the investigation before putting me back to work."

"I don't see any need for that. There's obviously something out of the ordinary going on, but OPP has positively identified you as Tony Sutton, and that's good enough for me. Besides, I have a brand new account that I want you to get started on."

It was nice to know that the boss had some confidence in me.

"Great," I said with some enthusiasm. "Who's the client?"

"Star Farms Insurance."

I almost choked. "St-Star Farms Insurance?"

"Is something wrong?"

"No sir. Nothing at all. I'll get right to work on it."

I wanted to kill Epstein! I wanted to kill Norm Gilbert! I wanted to commit suicide! Instead, I read the work order and began planning a campaign to sell more Star Farms policies. (I wasn't sure a suicide attempt would work anyway, given the situation I was in.)

Several days passed, and in spite of interruptions from Jon Chapel, Gilbert, and the news media, I managed to put together a preliminary package of ideas to take to the Star Farms people. My catch-phrase would be "always on the job" and I could attest to that personally. I would suggest some spots on holovision, but mainly I wanted to buy time on mass transit viewscreens. My reasoning was that working people bought insurance, and most working people rode the solar-buses. I, in fact, had been killed in a solar-bus wreck. I was watching an Inter-Bank spot on the viewscreen when it happened, as best I could remember.

Finally, I took the whole package into Epstein's office for approval. We spent almost three hours going over it, and making revisions, and then Epstein called Star Farms to send a representative. I knew what that meant; we'd have to review the whole package again, and the Star Farms people would undoubtedly have suggestions and revisions of their own. But that's the advertising business for you. It always seems that by the time your original ideas make it to the holovision sets, or the audio services, or the viewscreens—you don't even recognize them.

I was still lost in my thoughts when the Star Farms "representative" showed up, and I don't suppose I have to tell you who it was.

Norman Gilbert.

I found it impossible to disguise my feelings. "Oh no. What have I done to deserve this?" I said.

"Just lucky, I suppose." He seemed to take delight in the harrassment.

"But Norm, aren't you a claims adjustor? I thought they'd send out a big shot."

"I asked for the assignment. Besides, I'm in line for a promotion, and if I do a good job on this case, I might get it a little sooner." He went on to explain that the Front Office thought he'd be the right man to discuss the ad campaign with me because we were such close "friends."

I got the feeling that Star Farms was trying to use the advertising account as added leverage to recover my adjustment. At any rate, Norm had some news for me before we got down to work on the campaign.

"I got a call from the World Network today," he said rather smugly. "Chuck Storer says he's uncovered something new that might be related to your case."

"And what might that be?"

"As a matter of fact, he wouldn't say, but he told me not to miss his broadcast tonight. He was going to call you, but I told him I'd pass the information on since I had an appointment with you."

"Thanks."

"I took the liberty of promising that the two of us might be in the vicinity of the World Net Studios at newstime. Storer said he might want to do an interview with us after he breaks his new lead."

"I don't know about that. I'm more or less under the supervision of Jon Chapel right now, and I'd hate to make a comment without his OK."

"Then let's take him with us to the studio."

It seemed like a reasonable idea. And I was quite anxious to find out what new information Storer's investigative team had been able to dig up. So we called Chapel, and talked him into accompanying us to the World Network that evening. Then, Gilbert and I got down to work for the next several hours on the job at hand.

We broke up the meeting in time to grab a bite to eat, and make it to the network in time to meet Chapel, and watch the newscast. We had almost managed to finish work on the campaign, and Gilbert was to go ahead and present it to the honchos at Star Farms.

CHAPEL WAS already at the studio when we arrived. The Three of us were ushered into a small screening room adjacent to the on-air studio, where we would watch the newscast. We were told that Storer was hoping to have one or more of us on the air live for reaction to his new information. We decided to play it by ear.

It was almost newstime; we saw two commercials, and then the World News logo hit the screen—a caricature of the Earth, in three dimensions, with Chuck Storer's features where North America should be. Then, Storer was on the air.

"It's seven o'clock in Eastern North America, and this is news from the World Network." The image of Storer glided into the lower left side of the graph as a shot of another man dissolved into view behind him.

"A well publicized paradox has repeated itself," Storer said with great emphasis. "The World Network has learned that a man in Pennsylvania has died—and returned—in much the same manner as Anthony Armstrong Sutton."

I gasped. So I'm not the only one, I thought. I sneaked a glance at Chapel and Gilbert, and they were both watching the holograph intently.

Storer was now interviewing the other man who had returned from the dead. His story was very similar to mine—he had been killed in a solar-bus wreck; he had been dead less than two weeks before his return; and his "other body" remained in its grave.

Storer was ending his interview, and heading into a commercial. I wanted to turn to Chapel and ask what all this meant, but I stopped when I saw a holo-camera beginning to focus its three-dimensional eye on us. A panel on the desk in front of us automatically slid forward to reveal sound discs. I realized that Storer didn't intend to give us much of a choice as to whether we wanted to be interviewed. I wondered if the studio was locked. None of us bothered to check it. Instead Chapel looked at me and had some quick instructions:

"Tony, just be cool. Think before you answer any questions, and don't let Storer badger you." Then he looked at Gilbert, but he didn't say anything else.

In scarcely the time it takes to run to the kitchen and back, Storer was on the air again. "In an adjoining studio, we have with us Anthony Sutton, along with Jon Chapel, the director of the Office of Parapsychic Phenomena, and Norman Gilbert of Star Farms, the insurance company that's working on the Sutton case. Mr. Sutton, you've just seen our story about a second revival. What's your reaction?"

I could just picture millions of people in living rooms everywhere waiting to hear my reply. "Well, it's nice to know I'm not alone in all this. Since it's happened a second time, maybe some of the skeptics will begin to believe my story."

As Storer asked another question, the graph on the monitor changed to Gilbert.

"Speaking of skeptics, Mr. Gilbert, you once considered this whole episode to be a hoax for insurance claims. Now, I understand that Mr. Sutton's agency has been retained to develop Star Farms' next advertising campaign. Don't you think that's a cheap trick to cash in on all the publicity?"

Norm was clearly not expecting that question. It was fun to see him put on the spot for a change, especially with his big promotion still up for grabs.

"Mr. Storer, our company retained the agency at least a month before the death of Mr. Sutton. It was pure coincidence that Tony was assigned to the Star Farms account, but I think that points out our firm's ability to be neutral in the matter until a final determination is made by the government."

Phooey, I thought. Gilbert would consider it a feather in his cap to get my settlement returned. But he was sure cool about his answer to Storer, darn it.

"Speaking of the government," Storer continued, "Mr. Chapel, will OPP launch a separate investigation of this occurrence in Pennsylvania?"

"Mr. Storer, we don't have funds at the current time to explore the two incidents separately, but since they might well be related to one another, I think we'll have to do some checking."

There were a few more questions, and then Storer went off into another pre-recorded segment of the newscast. I turned and asked Chapel how many other unsuspecting subjects might have been trapped in the so-called "viewing" studio.

After the newscast, Chapel managed to obtain a copy of Storer's script with all the details about Edward Parry, the man who had revived in Pennsylvania. Chapel said he would contact Parry and get more information, then feed all the data concerning both incidents into the government's computer system. We kept thinking there must be some link—something in common between me and Edward Parry. Chapel went to work that night to find out what it was.

Two days later, Chapel called me to the Government Center to discuss his progress. When I arrived at the office, Chapel's desk was covered with computer printouts.

"Nothing," he said. "The computer can find no connection between you and Parry. We've tried every angle possible, but if it's a puzzle we're working on, the pieces don't fit."

I exhaled heavily. "Did you run a check on all the passengers on the two solar-busses?"

"Every single one. We have complete lists of who was on the busses those days, and checked the complete files of them all. No connections anywhere."

"Did you remember the solar directors of the busses?"

"Yes; still no connection."

"How about Parry himself—he's not an advertising man is he?"

"No, as a matter of fact, Parry works for the government, and that made it simple to get all the facts and figures on him. But with all the checking, the only common link is the situation itself—you and Parry, both killed in solar-bus accidents, and brought back to life approximately one month later."

"If that's the only common denominator, then maybe that's the route we should pursue." I stopped a moment to gather my thoughts. "Were the busses themselves exactly alike?"

Chapel began searching through the mountain of information on his desk. "That's a viable point. Let's see here—oh, here's some background on the busses. The one in Pennsylvania was manufactured in New Jersey by the Flare Corporation; the bus here was made by Butler Industries. So there's no connection there either." He tossed the papers back down onto the pile.

But I wouldn't give up on the line of thought. "Wait a minute, Jon. Why don't we take it back even farther than just the manufacturer. There've been hundreds of improvements made in solar-busses over the years. Do you think the government's computer system would keep track of all the changes?"

Chapel stroked his beard and nodded. "It's worth a try," and pressing the intercom button, he told his secretary, "Linda, get me a computer expert from 13-B."

In a moment, the computer operator was on the line, and Chapel made an

appointment for us to descend to 13-B, where the government's computer system was lodged.

"B" stood for basement. It took thirteen sub-ground floors to house all the electronic brains that Uncle Sam used in just this section of New York. As we walked through the maze, I couldn't help but wonder that the nation-wide hook-up must entail. It all was hooked together, so it shouldn't be too difficult to call up the information we wanted. Chapel wasn't allowed to fool with the system himself, because he wasn't a computer expert—oh, these days of super-specialization.

Chapel had to fill out several forms (ironically enough, the left side of the pages were red in color), and show his government I.D., and then we were deposited into a waiting area. Chapel looked a bit frustrated, and I heard him mumble—"You're always a second class citizen when you're on grant money." I remembered reading in the I.P. that OPP would have gotten cut anyway. Might as well take the grant money and like it.

We had each finished our second Coke when our operator informed us that our request would be ready by the time we could walk to the printout area. Upon arrival there, we found only a few pages of information—but maybe there would be something useful—the missing link, as we had started to call it.

The printouts were quite plain, in fact they were practically in conversational English. The one I was scanning described in great detail how the Flare Company had improved upon the early solar cells, added the anti-grav devices, and installed the Girard repelling system. (Once a bus went to anti-grav, the repelling system was an almost essential safety element.)

Chapel was mentally fishing through his report, too, as we stepped on the elevator for the ride back to the OPP section. "My report has basically the same information regarding Butler," he said. "They picked up the anti-grav system back about twenty years ago, and run their busses an average of twenty feet above ground transportation—" he was thinking aloud. "They're on multi-range solar cells, which can tap moonlight and starlight, but they get 99.8% of their energy from Sol."

We were entering Chapel's office again, by this time. "You said they're an anti-grav carrier like Flare—what repelling system do they use?"

Chapel studied the printouts. "Fischer. No—Girard. They went to Girard last year."

That's it, I thought! "Jon, was Parry's bus wreck due to repeller failure?"

"It was! And so was yours! Tony, we may have hit on it!"

OPP kept a fairly decent library, and we pulled volume "G" of the *Who's Who In Science*. Girard merited only a few lines, but it was enough to put us on his trail: "Girard, William G. (B.S., University of Chicago; Ph. D., Syracuse in Chemistry; Ph. D., Syracuse in Physics; doctoral dissertation: "Theories of Chronal Mitosis"): New York City scientist, specializing in several fields; best known for development of repelling system now used as a safety mechanism in virtually all airborne transportation."

Chapel was obviously excited, and so was I! I grabbed for the city telephone directory to look for Girard's address, while Chapel buzzed Linda. When she answered, he instructed her to contact Syracuse immediately and see if the library there could get us a printout of Girard's doctoral dissertation through the computer lines.

Since most major college libraries have facilities for computer scanning, we felt like we could have a copy of the dissertation within hours. I decided to go home and get some rest until the printout arrived, but before I left I jotted down Girard's address and left it with Chapel.

IT WAS early next morning when Chapel's secretary called to tell me that the dissertation printout had arrived. An hour later, I walked into his office.

"Have you had a chance to look over it yet?" I asked.

"I've read most of it, Tony—enough to be convinced that Dr. Girard is the missing link in our puzzle!" He was stroking his beard again.

"Well, let's have it! I was up all night wondering about it!" I wasn't kidding. I had waited a long time to find out how I came back to life, and as Chapel began to unravel Girard's theories, I could feel my heart pounding like a trip-hammer, and my hands were sweating. I rubbed them on my pant legs.

"I've underlined the essential portions of the theme, Tony, and I'll read them to you. He begins by describing what he sees as a basic fallacy in many theories concerning time and time travel: 'Time has been described as a river, moving in an eternal curve. The present (now) is preceded by the past, and followed by the future, which cannot be changed by tampering with past events. It is my theory, however, that time is not a single flow, but a series of flows, lending many possible futures to a single present. In essence, I am saying that the future does not exist in any specific form, but, can be controlled without necessarily changing the now, through application of my Theory of Chronal Mitosis.'"

"Chronal mitosis?" I asked, butting in. "What does mitosis have to do with time manipulation? That's a biological term."

"Correct," answered Chapel. "Simply put, mitosis occurs when the chromosomes in a cell split in two just prior to the cytoplasm itself undergoing fission. When the process is completed, you have two cells, each identical to the first. Dr. Girard is borrowing the term, and applying it to his own theories, even though they concern time rather than biology."

"You mean Girard is saying that time can be split in two like a cell?"

Chapel's eyes were glued to the printout. "No, if I'm reading this right, that's not what he's saying at all. Let me read you his exact definition of chronal mitosis: 'The process through which any particle of matter regenerates itself forward in time at the speed of light, while also remaining stationary in all preceding time frames.'"

He looked at me as he tried to make me understand the definition. "Tony, what he's saying is that time moves forward in rapid-fire spurts, that he calls time-frames. But as each time-frame moves forward in the flow, each preceding frame continues to exist in the past. That's where he gets the term 'mitosis.' See? Each time-frame is dividing in two; one half remains where it is, while the other moves forward just slightly in time. Then, it too divides, and the process is repeated, over and over and over. It never stops."

I began to catch on. "Then according to Girard, the speck of time in between each pair of divisions is one time-frame."

"Exactly. Let me quote from the theme again: 'Chronal mitosis can be compared to old style motion-pictures (or movies) which were used in the Twentieth Century before holography became popular. Movies were a series of pictures, photographed in rapid succession, and printed on celluloid strips of film which ranged from 8 millimeters in width to 70 millimeters (although I believe 140 millimeter film stock was popular before the art of film-making gave way to progress). When the developed film was moved through a projector at a speed equal to that of the photographing device, the pictures had the illusion of movement. So it is with actual time. Just as each separate picture, or frame of a movie combined to make a flow of movement on the screen, so do time-frames combine to form movement in the real world. With one exception, however, that is where the comparison must end. While the future of a movie lies before it in the frames that have yet to be drawn by the lens, there is no future already in existence

in the real world. The future happens only when a time-frame divides, thereby pushing hard on the flow of time.' ”

Chapel paused in his reading, and I said, “I think I understand the analogy. He’s saying that chroral mitosis is like a strip of film, because as the film progresses, new frames are constantly taking the place of the old, but even so, the used frames continue to exist. But I still don’t see how that explains my revival.” I knew Chapel had an idea forming in his mind, because he was stroking his beard harder than ever.

“Tony, remember what he said about one more comparison to movie film? Well, I think that one final comparison is our answer.” He paused again, and turned a page in the printout. Then, finding the paragraph he was looking for, he continued, “Tony, there’s one last thing you should remember about how they used to make movies, if you ever studied the subject in school.” He stared at me.

“Go on . . .”

“Film can be spliced!”

“Of course!” I was struck by the simplicity of it all. “If Girard is right, and time exists in frames, then why not make a splice in time itself? Jon, do you think that’s what has happened?”

“It’s the only answer we have, Tony. If you need more proof, just look at the dissertation. Right here toward the end of the paper, Girard says that it’s possible to build a machine that can reach out and grab a specified time-frame, and weld it to an alternate probability in the present.”

“But that *must* change the future, and Girard said that can’t be done!”

“No, Tony! Remember, your body was still in its grave. If Girard built such a machine, he brought you back by splicing a time-frame *before* your death to a time-frame in the present. The Tony Sutton that died in that solar-bus wreck is still dead, and is still proceeding in the time flow.”

“But the existence I have now—” I was getting panicky. “—where would *this* Tony Sutton be now, if the other one had never died?”

“*This* Tony Sutton,” Chapel answered, trying to keep cool, “would exist *only* as a probability. It took the time splice to bring that probability to life.”

“Incredible!” I was overwhelmed. I stared blankly at the wall for what must have been several minutes. When I had regained my senses, I asked Chapel if Girard had gone into more detail about the machine.

“He wanted to build a prototype, but was stymied by a lack of funds. According to the paper, he estimated the cost at well over a hundred-thousand dollars, but he never built it because he couldn’t raise the funds.”

“Well, he must have come up with the money somewhere,” I said.

“Shall we find out?” Chapel rose from his chair, and began to gather up the pages of the dissertation. “We looked up the office address last night. Let’s pay a surprise visit to Dr. William Girard.”

I agreed that I was ready to meet the man who brought me back to life, so we headed for the elevator, telling Linda that we were simply going on a research expedition.

STEPPING OFF the elevator, Chapel and I couldn’t help but notice Norm Gilbert and Chuck Storer heading our way. Chapel grabbed my arm and we tried to duck around the corner, but it was too late.

“There they are now!” I heard Gilbert say to Storer.

“There’s no use trying to get away,” Chapel said, rubbing his beard fiercely.

Storer extended his hand, and applied his big, booming, network-announcer’s voice: “Where to in such a hurry gentlemen? You wouldn’t be checking out some

kind of a lead, would you?" He gave Chapel a you-can't-fool-me look.

The OPP director looked at me sheepishly for a second. "All right, all right. We're on our way now to check out a theory. You can call me this afternoon at the office and I'll tell you if it panned out."

"Now wait just a minute," said Storer. "You don't expect me to . . . !"

Gilbert and I stood back and watched them go at it. It was a hopeless cause for our side. After several minutes of bickering (which changed into negotiations) Storer convinced Chapel to let him and Gilbert tag along. In fact, the only concession that Storer made was that he wouldn't call a camera crew. Chapel was still muttering under his beard when the four of us boarded the solar-bus.

Chapel was too upset to do much talking during the ride, but he allowed me to explain (as best I could) the Girard Theory of Chronal Mitosis. Storer took it all in, obviously visualizing the story he could put together if it all turned out to be true. I even heard him mention the possibility of entering the story in the Holy Award competition. (That's the award for the best holo-graph story of the year.) When I finished with my explanation of the Girard theories, Gilbert told me about the progress of the Star Farms investigators who had been working on my case. He said they were sending a man out of the Philadelphia office to question Edward Parry. There were no leads in the search for my missing wife. A few more moments, and we found ourselves in front of Dr. Girard's quarters.

The Girard home (where his lab was also located) was about as suburban as a place could get in this day and age. There were several other houses in the vicinity, but we had left most of the high rise buildings back in the heart of the city. As we left the bus, Chapel admonished Gilbert and Storer to keep quiet, and let *him* do the talking. I remember thinking how foolish it was to expect *those* two to shut up, but really I didn't care. I was getting that nervous feeling again, and my hands were sweating.

We could hear faint noises coming from inside. Chapel rang the bell. There was no answer. He rang again, then knocked. After a wait that seemed an eternity, we heard a chain slide from within, and the door began to open. As anxious as I was, I never expected to see the face behind that door!

"Liz!"

We stood, staring at each other for just a moment, neither of us knowing what to do. Do you embrace a wife who is a runaway? Or was she? Perhaps she was abducted. Before I could ask, she spoke . . . softly . . .

"Tony—please. Don't try to stop Dr. Girard. He's in the middle of his greatest experiment."

Chapel could see how shocked I was, and he pushed me back just a bit, and took my place in the conversation. (I must confess, I haven't the slightest memory of what Storer and Gilbert were doing all this time, but I suppose they must have been listening to what was going on.)

"Mrs. Sutton, suppose we agree not to barge in on Dr. Girard—can you explain what's going on here?" He was doing his best to speak soothingly (as if back on the hot seat at that news conference).

"I-I had to stay here and help him once I discovered what he hoped to accomplish."

She looked ready to explain everything. Chapel was silent, and let her talk.

"Dr. Girard is a good man, Mr. Chapel." (She apparently recognized Jon from his holovision appearances.) "As a man with a conscience, he became very distressed when repeller systems that he designed malfunctioned, and caused some people to die. Even though those people were dead, he felt he could help them.

"He remembered an idea he had once worked out—where he might be able to

change the way things turn out. He worked on the theory some more, and started building a machine. But he needed money."

She was sobbing now, and Chapel gently urged her to go on.

"He read about Tony . . . that it happened because of repeller failure. He called me and promised to bring Tony back if I would help him raise the money."

"And that's what happened to the insurance settlement, isn't it?" asked Chapel.

"Yes—and when I got that phone call from Tony—I couldn't believe it. I came back here immediately. For one thing, I knew that with Tony alive, the insurance people would expect their money back. But more than that, I wanted to help Dr. Girard . . ."

"Help Dr. Girard do what?" He shook her. "Help him do what?"

A new shadow fell, as Girard himself appeared in the doorway.

"Help me resurrect my dead son, Mr. Chapel."

Chapel let go of Liz, and I took her in my arms. She was still crying. Girard stood there for a second, looking the part of a desperate man. We knew his age, but he looked much older. A good deal of his hair was gone, he was rather frail, and his clothes were those of a doctor. He looked back around his shoulder for a second as if to indicate his great experiment. Then, he turned to Chapel.

"The process is already underway. The scanner will go back five years. The computer will lock in on a time-frame just before the accident. That frame will be welded to an alternate probability in the present."

As he spoke, the strange clicking noises stopped. Girard motioned for us to enter the lab.

"The process is complete," he said as we walked through the two rooms to get to the work area.

And then we saw the machine. Not too impressive, really. A visual scanner (not even three dimensional), and a myriad printed circuits, all hooked into a computer. But we knew it worked.

Storer emerged with a question: "If your son has been revived, Dr. Girard—where is he?"

"He exists now, where he *might* have existed in an alternate probability, Mr. Storer. The machine can't tell me where that is. We'll just have to wait."

But the wait didn't take long. Someone was coming down the stairs. We all turned, our eyes fixed on the stairway as if we were victims of mass hypnosis. Another instant, and Girard knew that his miracle machine had worked once more.

"David—son!" Girard hurried to him.

"Dad? You . . . look older . . . somehow . . ."

Those were the only words the younger Girard had time to speak. There was an explosion, totally disintegrating the boy, and knocking his father to the floor.

Instinctively, I dropped to the floor, and tried to shield Liz. The others had ducked for cover also, but in a moment, Chapel rushed to Girard's side, propping his head in his hand.

"Doctor, are you alright?" I heard him ask.

"Yes—I'm fine—but my son . . . David . . ."

"I'm sorry Doctor," Chapel said softly. "Your son is gone. Somehow, he couldn't survive the process."

"Too much time . . ." Girard muttered. ". . . five years . . . couldn't hold . . . too long . . ."

With that, Girard lapsed into unconsciousness.

"Tony!" Chapel exclaimed. "I think he's saying that the splice broke!"

Storer ran to call a camera crew; Gilbert finally peeked from behind some machinery; I walked over to help Chapel with the Doctor.

"Call an ambulance," I said to Gilbert.

YOU SHOULD know, in closing, that Dr. Girard recovered fully. Chapel had some grant money left over from the investigation, and he managed to funnel it to Girard's research, and the Doctor still hopes to revive his son (although he knows one probability has been eliminated). Gilbert got his promotion, and the Star Farms board of directors was so pleased with all the publicity from my case (and my advertising campaign, too) that attempts to recover the settlement were abandoned. Storer had the exclusive story on the World Network that night—and he won his award. OPP so commanded the public's favor, that it managed to work its way into the national budget, and won't have to operate on grants anymore.

For my part—well, Liz and I are back together, and plan to live happily ever after—as long as my splice holds out. ●

by Lynn Woolley

I was born late in 1949 in Temple, Texas and received my high school education there. I attended Temple Junior College, making Who's Who in American Jr. Colleges, and the Dean's list. I then secured my degree in Radio/TV/Film from the University of Texas at Austin, graduating in 1972.

While in Temple, I became interested in radio, working as a deejay at KYLE and KTEM. In Austin, I entered the news department of KNOW.

Upon graduating, I moved to Dallas to become an anchorman at WFAA radio, and later moved over to KRLD. While there, I won the Dallas Press Club "Katie" for best documentary of 1976.

After my stint at KRLD, I became news director of KAAM in Dallas, a job I still hold.

During my radio career I have covered two presidents, done play-by-play on radio of a tennis match featuring Jimmy Connors, and have interviewed hundreds of notable people.

One interview done at a nostalgia convention was edited into a 30-minute radio program, and later became a very successful series of articles.

I helped prepare a radio news textbook called *Tape: A Radio News Handbook* for Hastings House, and have just completed

a book called *Warner Bros. Television for A.S. Barnes and Co.*

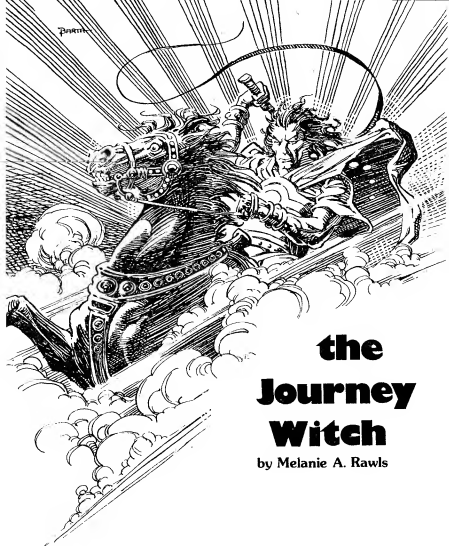
I have sold many articles in several different fields, but usually about radio, television or films. Sales have been made to The Dallas Morning News, Texas Monthly, Midnight/Globe, Star Warp, Amazing World of DC, Radio News Hotline, and the Big Reel. I'm currently working on an article for *Cinefantastique*.

"A Stitch In Time" is my first sale in the area of science-fiction, but I hope very much to write more of this type of stuff.

Why we chose this story

Tampering with Time and Alternate realities can be dangerous and confusing. This piece deals neatly with both possibilities.

Puente



the Journey Witch

by Melanie A. Rawls

Illustrated by Hilary Barta

**Emistisigno was no proper name for a man . . .
it was an ancient and potent word of power.**

It is not for me to turn aside from the sick and injured however or whenever they are found. I am a journey witch of the order of the Sundial Garden; we are a garden order that deals in herbs and healing. And so, when I saw the figure of the man lying on the side of the road in that twisted limpness that bespeaks death or unconsciousness, I scrambled down the shallow incline to investigate.

And this in spite of the great unease that had gripped me since I'd turned down that road.

All day I lectured myself: this unease is simply fatigue, the result of that sennight of nursing in a fever-ridden village; this depression is caused by the thinness of the air in this high mountainland; this cold is caused only by that hatchet-edged wind that whistles so angrily through the pines; this paranoia and apprehension is bad food, bad water, bad temper and superstition, superstition about the mountains of Soria Besh, the Wild Lands where, it is rumored, mortal, immortal and unmortal alike roam and meet and change each other's destiny as they do in the Summer Country.

Bad fortune had brought me here to this bleak land with its ignorant suspicious inhabitants, as sullen and xenophobic in sickness as they were in health; to this land of scrubby forests and narrow roads arching across the backs of the longest tallest mountain range in the western world, then diving into the desolate heath that was the Soria Besh. And I should be here in autumn when there's no warmth in the sun!

I forgot my complaints as I examined the injuries of my patient—a man long of leg and arm, lean of body, black skinned and with dark dense hair bushy like a well-clipped lion's mane. As I gently rolled his body from face to back, I tallied those injuries: long jagged cut in the leg dealt, apparently, by some sharp instrument that had ripped leather boots and breeches with ease before plowing flesh; cut arm, hole in the shoulder, hideously battered face. The ragged shirt fell open and I saw large areas of discolored skin on chest and belly, purple-blue bruises on black skin. And his hands—the injuries to them puzzled me most. It was as if he had grasped something razor sharp and red hot for the palms were scored with burned cuts.

I proceeded to business, cleaning, salving and bandaging. He was lucky, for no blood veins had been severed; nevertheless he had lost much blood. Also, from the state of his clothing, I judged he had been lying by the roadside since the night before, at least. He would have to have one tough constitution to survive such exposure with his injuries. I pulled another bottle of cleansing water from my cloak and began to wash his face.

The slightly sharp but pleasant herbal scent of the water was probably what brought him around. I watched as the long dark lids above puffy cheekbones flickered—then flared open to reveal the truest violet eyes I've ever seen. An extraordinary color, rich as the shade of a clear winter sky after the sun has gone down, jewel-like and vivid in that dark face.

My patient parted his lips with an effort, eyes bright and incongruously lively in his sunken face. "Journey witch?" he whispered huskily.

"Yes. Don't talk." I dabbed at his face.

"Luck change," he whispered.

"Maybe. Don't talk."

"Who are you?"

"Someone who'll gag you if you don't shut up until you are better able to talk!" He chuckled softly. "Tell me. Or I'll wonder, spending energy anyway—" He winced as I went around his swollen mouth.

"All right. I am a journey witch healer of the Sundial Garden. Now, save your strength. I'm going to get you up on my horse and get you to a village—"

"No!" His eyes flared wide again and he actually clutched my arm with those hideously damaged hands, and gasped in pain. "They will look—"

"Who? Robbers? The Sheriff of the Summer Country? A wicked old magician whose talisman you've stolen?" My own reasonless unease made me sharper than usual. But he smiled faintly.

"That last is close enough," he muttered.

I stared at him. His smile widened.

Nothing to do but be matter-of-fact. I bound up the worst of his wounds and told him that, regardless of his fears, he needed warmth and shelter and that I was going to take him to the nearest village. He did not dispute me again.

I got him up over my shoulder and staggered to the road—he was a solidly muscled man and that, plus his height, gave him a weight you could not guess from his slender appearance. My sapphire blue mare, Gentian, rolled her eyes and laid back her ears, taking exception to him in a manner unlike her usual tolerance to any and all people and circumstances.

A faint wry chuckle sounded over my shoulder. "Your horse doesn't think very highly of me."

"She's a most discerning creature," I returned acidly. "But she'll let you ride if you can manage to stay on bareback. I know you can't grip with your hands at all and probably very little with your injured leg, but I'll hold you if you can balance. Otherwise, I'll have to tie you on head down."

"A litter?" he whispered.

"Would be too unwieldy to drag over these narrow rutted paths. And I can't tie one onto Gentian's back myself."

"I'll do what I can."

"Good." I took a deep breath and sidled up to Gentian, heaving him on between the two packs strapped firmly to her back. After some struggle he got a leg across and changed his weight from my back to hers. I whirled and caught him as he slumped to one side, then urged Gentian slowly and carefully toward a large stone so that I could mount also. Sitting uncomfortably on my roll of blankets, I instructed her to walk slowly and carefully. With a disdainful snort, she started off.

"Journey witch riding. That's unusual," came my patient's persistent voice.

"You'd rather I walked and let you cling as you can?" I answered impatiently.

"You never actually told me your name."

In the manner of my mare, I rolled my eyes. "Do you know many journey witches who tell their names to strangers?"

"No. So what's yours?"

"I am Aisha."

"Hmmm! Aisha who has a tendency to reply to a query or a statement with a question. The name sounds feminine."

"What makes you think it shouldn't?"

"I wondered but I didn't like to ask. Your cloak hides your face and figure —"

"You ever hear of a journey witch who didn't hide face and figure?"

"No. I know that custom and am amused at how rigidly you people seem to keep to it." He bowed at the waist some and I tightened my hold on his middle. "Still . . . Your hands were woman-shaped but you picked me up with ease. Like a strong man. And I'm no light weight."

"You're telling me?"

This amazing being laughed again. "Yes. Well, I think I am pleased, on the whole, that you are of the, shall I say, feminine persuasion. Allow me to thank you, my dear lady."

"Don't thank me yet!" I answered testily. "You know, for someone in your condition you're damned chatty and inquisitive."

"Quite so." Faint shaking of the shoulders. "I hope you don't mind. I'm feeling a bit light headed."

"Keep up the chat and I'll gladly relieve your neck of the problem."

"Yes ma'am." Meekly.

Gentian plodded on. When we came to a division in the way I thought for a moment then sent Gentian to the left. If my bearings were correct, there should be a village in that direction, tucked under a mountain spur.

Unearthly silence. It was as if we were the only living moving beings in that mountain world. On all sides stretched the tangled evergreen forest, its shaggy boughs and green-black shadows protecting secrets and shielding us from all but glimpses of the high cold sky, brittle-blue and porcelain smooth. The sun was only a thin silver dapple of light. The mountains were massed on all sides, buckled up under our feet, towering above our heads and closing us in; all paths were narrow and rain-gouged, going up and down at the most extreme angles. Gentian moved gently. My stomach twisted itself into knots. I felt keenly as if someone watched or searched for us, hunted us with malice and determination. My anxiety was acute.

Finally I broke the silence. "Er — sir, can you answer a question?"

"Yes, most likely." His voice was a little stronger.

"Who are you? What are you called?"

He was silent, obviously considering. I wondered if his injuries had caused a loss of memory. (They certainly had not tied his tongue!) "Would you like to call me Smith?" he said finally.

"Not really," I replied sourly. "But I will — and you can call me Violet."

He burst out laughing. Alarmed I called for Gentian to halt; she did, whickering softly and flicking her tail restlessly while I held tightly to the lunatic guffawing in my arms.

"By lightning, I've never met anyone like you!" said the man gleefully, a hitch in his voice for he was out of breath and his bruised ribs must be aching abominably.

"All right, Aisha, journey witch and healer," he said breathlessly. "You ask my name, I give it to you. Smith's pretty close, but I am Emistisiguo. How's that?"

"Emistisiguo," I repeated dully. "Thank you." We rode on and I forbid further talking. But not because I wanted him to conserve his strength. No, I wanted to think. Emistisiguo was no proper name for a man. It was an ancient and potent word of Power.

MY GUESS was correct and it was not long before we were riding into the tiny hamlet of Six Stones which straggled dreamily across a green mountain meadow. The houses were of stone, rough but sturdy, and the people were the same. I suppose because they lived on the lower slopes of the mountains of Soria Besh, they could take our outlandish appearance in stride: a mare with a coat the color of sapphires, a six foot figure heavily cloaked and hooded in dark blue and a six and a half foot man, clad, for the most part, in slashed up leather and who was battered and bruised but whose eyes were as alert and lively as if he were attending an amusing party. Knowing my garments to be the habit of a journey witch, the people offered us shelter, food and fire, going a long way toward reversing my bad opinion of the Beshian mountain folk.

Our host was Phane, a herdsman and baker. He gave up the bed in his little three room house to Emistisiguo; and allowed me to use a chair to support that one's lower legs and feet which stuck out beyond the mattress. I realized Phane was somewhat apprehensive of me — he watched me from the corners of his eyes and flied if I made a sudden move; but he boiled water as I requested and aided me in fixing a decoction for the injured man. He was quick and deft and I appreciated his help.

To my relief, Emistisiguo slept a quiet profound slumber. I sat by the bed and Phane brought me food — bread, cheese, dried fruit and thin milk in an oaken cup. I ate all and he watched curiously.

As the afternoon progressed, my anxiety had eased some, the peace and remote security of the hamlet soothing my nerves. But as evening drew in, I felt my foreboding return. I sat behind Phane's stone walls and strained the ears of my body and my art — and so at last I heard what I feared: the thud of horse hooves and the cries of many voices inimical to Emistisiguo. I crept to the window.

The moon had risen early, pouring silver into the bowl of blue-violet dusk that was the sky and mountain-shadowed clearing. Though the light was dim, I could clearly see the faces of the riders, handsome and arrogant, with big blade noses, long mobile mouths and long narrow eyes screwed up with cruelty and amusement. Whips slashed and horses wheeled squealing while the hamlet dwellers scurried about, some pointing to Phane's house.

Phane himself came in. "They look for you," he said expressionlessly. "They are asking after all strangers."

I nodded. "I will come out. You must not tell them that there is anyone here but me."

"We do not say; mountain people say as little as possible." That, after my sojourn in that village in the heights, I very well believe. "But these beings are cruel," continued Phane. "They have threatened us. And they are well-armed."

"Hmph!" I shook my cloak, gusting the odor of the herbs stored in its numerous inside pockets. "You are many — and a pitch fork in the behind can make a point as well as any sword. Besides, I am well-armed, too." I pushed aside the cloak to display the hilt of the rune-cruled broadsword that weights my belt.

I picked up my wand and stepped around him and outside. The lead horseman brought his mount dancing up to me in a shower of dirt and stone. He leaned out of the saddle to pluck back my hood, but I ducked away — and a prick from my wand caused his horse to demand a greater share of his attention than did my hood.

"May I be of assistance to you?" I asked politely.

"Who are you and where did you come from?"

"Who are you and why do wish to know?"

"Who are you to ask?" His voice was brutal as was the look in his eyes. I had never seen a face as handsome or as cruel. "Just answer me," he ordered.

"Why?"

"Because I ask you — and I have ways of getting answers when I want them."

"No doubt," I sniffed. "Great bullies do, for a time, go far. However, I have nothing to hide. I am a journey witch of the Order of the Sundial Garden."

"Ah, a healer-witch — and have you come across someone in need of your services in the mountains?"

"Yes," I answered. "There's a village further up the slopes that suffered a fever epidemic. I have been there a week; I am now on my way back to my own place."

He cocked his head. "What, nobody else? No simple person? A scoundrel escaping punishment, somewhat injured, perhaps?"

"If I found an injured person is it likely I'd be dipping into business that wasn't

mine or asking for character references?" I retorted scornfully. "No. You're the only scoundrel I've seen around here."

I threw up my arm, but I was not quick enough. The whip slashed out, slicing cleanly through the heavy cloth of my hood, so that it fell away and left exposed the angry cut newly laid across my cheekbone. With a cry I covered my face with my hands.

"If you're lying to me, there will be more of this," my assailant promised me. "And running won't do you any good; I can easily find you no matter where you go." He laughed. "That's my mark, you know, stripe of the whip." He slashed at me again, neatly cutting the sleeve of my robe but not touching the skin beneath. I huddled back into Phane's doorway and watched the hunting party swing out of the village, scattering the people and their livestock like chaff. Phane took my arm gently and led me back inside.

PHANE HAD a bit of a mirror. Holding that in my left hand, with a bowl of water in which certain herbs were steeped wedged between my knees, I carefully washed my cut and welted face. The injury was extraordinarily tender, so that the tears in my eyes were from pain as well as anger.

I peered intently in the bit of glass. The injury might leave a large scar, and I did not need such on my face, a face already unusual enough to occasion a great deal of comment so that I, even more than was usual for a journey witch, took pains to keep it hidden. There is a widow's peak that comes to a point between my eyes and the crescents of hair that curve in from my hairline to beneath my cheekbones and point upward to the widow's peak. Fox-face I was called as a child, for my narrow, pointed, strangely decorated face did recall the malicious-innocent countenance of a fox. I sighed. Across my prominent cheekbone the livid cut could become an equally livid scar.

A hand on my shoulder. With profound amazement, the kind that suspends thought and makes you move slowly, I turned on my low stool. Emistisiguo stood there.

I had not heard him move at all, neither leave the bed nor come into Phane's tiny front room. Neither had my healer senses told me that my patient was awake and about. I looked up into Emistisiguo's face where the swelling and bruising had disappeared like magic. He looked down, then touched my cheek with a large light hand.

And immediately the burning pain went away, leaving my face cold and slightly numb.

"You do not look as I thought you would," said he. He smiled faintly. "I thought you'd be a heavy-jawed beldame with caterpillar eyebrows." I smiled faintly also. "Instead, you are quite young and attractive. And fierce and gentle and foolish and wise."

Bowing my head, I pulled the torn hood of my cloak up once again and retreated into the silence of the garden witch. And Emistisiguo went soft-footed back to bed.

I lay awake most of the night on a pallet in Phane's living room. The autumn wind whirling around the cottage was kept out by the sturdy stone but the lonesomeness of its voice in passing awoke an echo inside. Across the room, wrapped in blankets, Phane snored. I lay looking blind-eyed into the dark, thinking.

Who was Emistisiguo whose name was a word of Power, whose touch could draw away pain and deaden nerves quicker and better than any anesthetic I carried in my packets, who healed serious injuries in less than a day and who was hunted by a being hot-tempered and cruel? My premonition had not done the situation justice. It should have sent me streaking down the mountainside in a dash

for safety. For though I am an earth witch, one who looks down and digs deep and reads the language of plant and stone, I can recognize the heights when I see them. And neither Emistisiguo nor his enemy were mortals of the earth; they belonged to those rarefied planes of existence where the mind was an instrument to play and space and time but melodic rhythmic elements with which you composed your tune.

PHANE AND I fixed porridge the next morning. Emistisiguo was still asleep when I brought him a bowl. I shook him gently; and when he roused, I washed his face and hands for him. I noticed that the cuts in his hands were not healing as rapidly as his other injuries. I bound them up again and told him to hold them still while I fed him.

He took to this order with alacrity, obviously enjoying my waiting on him and enjoying the absurdity of the situation. The bright eyes were busy and an impertinent smile crooked his long mouth. I spooned his breakfast stoically.

"I want to ask you a few questions," I said.

"Yes, ma'am," answered he with false meekness.

"What is wrong with your hands?"

He grimaced faintly. "I seized the lash."

I took a short sharp breath. He looked sympathetic. "Would you like to know what's going on?"

"Yes."

"I think I owe you that. For the lashing he gave you."

"I think so, too."

He leaned forward and slid his hands inside my hood, touching my injured cheek lightly. I pulled away.

"That man who came here is my stepbrother Alasperion," he began easily. "I am older; my father married his mother so there is a deal of rivalry between us, mostly emanating from his side. We played a game of chance for high stakes. He cheated to win and I cheated to turn the game around." Emistisiguo shrugged. "He'd given his word that we were alone — and I was fool enough to accept his word. He called foul and summoned his men. I said something to him that infuriated him so that he attacked me with that whip of his. I managed to get away from his men and seized the thong to prevent it cutting my throat. Then I created a confusion and managed to escape."

"What was the wager for?"

"Er — we wagered for a rather special crystal owned by my stepmother's former husband's daughter. Do you follow?" He grinned as I worked it out. "And we wagered for the daughter," he added.

I blinked. "You wagered for a woman? What was she doing, sitting like a piece of cake on a saucer waiting for one of you to munch her up?"

"Naturally she wasn't present. But the outcome would have made no difference to her; for reasons of her own either one of us could prove useful to her." He chuckled. "Besides, that one can take care of herself. Anybody who'd try to munch her up would likely wind up with a mouthful of splintered teeth and a broken jaw to boot."

He gazed at me with amusement. "And now you're wondering what I could have been thinking to go to my stepbrother's alone when I am fully aware of his character."

"Do you think at all?" I asked in exasperation. Maddeningly enough he laughed.

"Probably not," he agreed. "I certainly wasn't thinking when I said what I said about his mother!" and he held out his slashed palms ruefully.

THE REMAINDER of the day passed without incident, Emistisiguo sleeping and the village going about its daily life. I busied myself about Phane's house, checked my stores, then settled down to some serious meditation on my patient and our separate predicaments.

I wanted to leave Emistisiguo then and there — he could probably take care of himself without further trouble on my part. But I owed Phane and his fellows. I could not leave Emistisiguo in their village, lodestone for danger as he was. Phane's people were no match for Alasperion. Though a garden witch, I know some lore of the Mountain; and the word ALASPERION was used in invocations of earthquake and earth fire. (EMISTISIGUO figured in spells for wind or lightning and other wild, unbodied and unstable elements. It figured.) Let Emistisiguo remain in Six Stones and the vengeful Alasperion might well topple a mountain peak down about their heads.

And so we would spend one more night in the village and be off early in the morning. I had hopes that Emistisiguo's leg would be healed enough for him to ride without my support or a slow and careful pace on Gentian's part.

That night, in the deepest time of the darkness, I woke with a burning pain in my face. It was excruciating, eating down through the flesh into the bone and burning along the skull until I thought my head would explode. I tossed on my pallet, trying to keep the lash mark from contact with anything including air; but the agony increased until I could not see for the tears wrung from my eyes. I got up and stumbled toward the bedroom where I'd laid out my medicines, alarmingly unsure of foot.

The utter cold silence of the room stopped me dead. I could see the shadow of my patient's long feet in the faint faint light seeping through the window, but there was no other sign of his presence, no sound of breath, no body warmth to the air, no feeling of being. With shaking hands I managed to light the bedside candle. The tiny gleam flickered across Emistisiguo's face and he groaned softly.

My relief was not lasting. The pain, like an iron mask contracting on my face, increased; and I could see that he lay with his hands upturned in an unnatural fashion. He groaned again and flexed his fingers feebly. I realized that we were under attack.

Alasperion, probably camped somewhere in a warm well-cushioned pavilion in the forest, had sent pain through the pathways of night to weaken us. The worst of it he would send to Emistisiguo, but I would get my share — I had defied him and he probably suspected that I was concealing Emistisiguo, as, of course, I was.

I pulled the stool up to the bed and proceeded to unwind the bandages on Emistisiguo's hands. The wounds positively glowed with heat, as did the throbbing cut on my face. I removed my bandage also; then began to treat us both with the pain-killing cream I had mixed earlier that day. The coolness on that fire was further agony.

Quite suddenly, my patient was back with me, staring at me with preternaturally bright violet eyes. He seemed to look me through and through, following the pathways of my brain behind my eyes. I sat completely still. He lifted a hand and began tracing delicately with his fingertips signs and circles all over my face; he lingered tenderly around my lips, but there was no magic in that, only touching. My pain went away. Like water slowly filling up a cup, I saw that pain fill his violet eyes.

"Don't," I choked. "Don't, Smith, I can bear it." But he closed his eyes and turned his face away and left again, no sound or sight of breathing, no warmth of being. The candle went out. I sat in the dark and held his hands gently, careful not to touch the inflamed palms, dreading to feel them cool off and stiffen. I rested my cheek on his shoulder. And after awhile it was dawn.

THE VILLAGE had no animals to spare. And I had very little to offer in exchange anyway; my stock in trade is healing and spells and they had no need of one and little dependence on the other. But I had to get Smith out of the village and down from the mountains, preferably to some place of power where he would be protected until he could heal himself completely before facing Alasperion again. I knew of such a place not too far from where we would emerge from the mountains — a sea witch's enclave where the feet of the Beshian mountains sink into the sea, the Order of the Emerald Osprey.

I managed to persuade the village leatherworker to sell me his spare saddle. I gave him what coppers there were in my pockets, medicines for his hands, which often ached in cold weather, and a blessing spell on his goods for a month. He drove a hard bargain, taking advantage of our need. I evened the score, though. I inserted a reversal into the spell which would activate after the month was up if his attitude did not improve.

For the first time, my Gentian was saddled and bridled, and with the villagers' help, I hoisted Smith into the saddle and wound the reins about his wrists. He was groggy in the cold morning air and sat slumped in the saddle.

I was tired because I had also attempted to repay Phane spellwise, which is not easy work. I put a spell of safety and luck on his cottage, a year's blessing on his bit of garden and his animals and the breads and confections he baked. He had not asked for payment, and so the spells were all the better for being gifts from my heart. But I did not relish the trip down the mountain.

We plodded along all morning and into the afternoon, making good time in the silver-green stillness. Smith swayed some in the saddle, but his spirits were good; while Gentian pranced along lightfooted and mettlesome as a filly in spring. I, back bent, had some trouble keeping up, but I slid and scrambled along the rutted way that meandered up and down and sideways through valley and pine forest.

About mid-afternoon, I halted beside a small rill and helped Smith down. Releasing Gentian to graze, I set out our meal, compliments of Phane — bread, honey, cheese and dried fruit. To Smith's amusement, I washed my hands carefully in the cold stream, then as carefully washed his face and hands with a cloth from the packs.

He grinned at me impudently; and suddenly, catching my face with his fingers, kissed me soundly. I pushed and we both rocked off balance. I seized his hands to keep him from catching himself with them; of course I lost my balance completely and fell heavily on my side. He took advantage of my breathlessness and tangle of robes to kiss me again. I swore and jerked my head, hitting him in the chin.

"If my hands were whole I'd paddle you for that," said he cordially.

"Ermistisguo, stop!" I cried.

"I like Smith better," said he and bent his head again.

I turned my face away and pushed. "I don't see how you can, under the circumstances," I scolded.

"If you're talking about Alasperion, he isn't a circumstance right now."

"Hmph! He'd like nothing better than to catch us off guard in some such ridiculous situation," I snorted.

"True. And I wouldn't want to give him ideas." Smith lifted his weight off me so that the sword ceased grinding into my side. I struggled to my feet, shaking my clothes out indignantly and he suddenly shouted with laughter. I resisted mightily the urge to clout him a good one across the head.

"Try anything else and I'll pull all your hair out!" I told him emphatically.

"Might be worth premature baldness." He ducked when I stooped for the

packet of cloth-wrapped cheese, but, of course, I did not throw it.

We ate the meal in companionable silence, and I sat and wondered why I put up with him. When we were done, I repacked everything and prepared to saddle Gentian.

"Come here," said Smith in a barely audible voice. It went over me like a sudden dash of cold water. I walked to him and knelt beside him where he sat propped up against a tree. I stared into his violet eyes, already mesmerized, caught in the net of his voice.

"Sit," he said and I sat beside him. He stretched out, put his arms around my hips and his head in my lap, closed his eyes and relaxed into sleep. I leaned back against the tree, smoothing his hair, and tried to think out what was going on. But I was unable to think, unable to feel anything but a distant surprise and a present honey-dipped contentment. I was not afraid of him. He had let me know how he had power over me, but at the same time showing that he would not use it.

OUR TWO day journey to the plains of the Soria Besh was like that. I never became accustomed to Smith's insouciance in the face of danger. There were times when I believed that Alasperion had given up the hunt, so peaceful were the mountain slopes; but I knew, in my heart, that that belief was seated more in wishful thinking than possibility. Alasperion was not the type of being to relinquish so easy a pursuit.

On the second night, just as we were preparing to make our first camp on the heath, Alasperion came. Emistisiguo had been teasing me, making outrageous plans for our future together when suddenly he stiffened. "Aisha," he said in a voice that brooked no argument, "get on Gentian and ride."

But I argued. "Smith —"

"Ride!" he hissed at me fiercely. "What maneuvering room have I if they hold you hostage? Get out of here!" He pulled me ruthlessly toward my trembling whimpering mare. Holding my wand in a shaking hand, I put my foot into the stirrup. Emistisiguo put his arms around me tightly from behind and kissed my cheek. Then I was in the saddle. "Good-bye, garden witch," he said. "Wish me luck."

"Oh luck, Smith —" I gasped, and he slapped Gentian's rear and we shot off.

That night ride was a roaring of wind in my ears and a blinding of my eyes. Gentian's hooves pounded the springy heath of the Soria Besh. I wanted to turn back, but Gentian was under compulsion for Smith knew that I would not willingly leave him to face a deadly enemy alone. I crouched in the saddle and tried hurriedly to weave a few spells of flight and concealment for us and spells of luck and safety for him; but the wind ripped the words from my mouth, shredding away the meaning and rendering them as impotent and helpless as leaves in an autumn blast. Gentian arrowed on.

And suddenly she stopped as if she had been transformed to stone. I went somersaulting over her head. I glimpsed the cruelly smiling visage of a hawk-nosed horseman before I dived head first through a ring of golden light and so into darkness.

I MUST have taken one hell of a toss. My body ached abominably, even though I instinctively relax my muscles when I fall and should have touched ground softly. Jarred bones and tender bruises shouted their existance from everywhere. I did not move or open my eyes, preferring to use my other senses and my Art to investigate my surroundings.

"Emis, you really prefer this funny-looking mortal to me?" said a feminine voice,

smooth as silk, languidly cultured, now faintly tinged with surprise, but withal decidedly imperious. It was elegant cover for as conniving, greedy and merciless a personality as any I'd ever sensed.

"Elez-melec, you know I never wanted you," came Smith's good-natured voice.

"True. I always knew your taste was suspect." A slender foot probed me. "This is merely supporting evidence. However, it does not explain why you wagered Alas for my hand."

"To aggravate Alas. You're a prize I'd sooner not claim," retorted Emistisiguo as if declining some ill-tempered heifer won at a fair.

"Dear me." I could hear the raised eyebrows. "You aggravated him, all right, and me as well." I heard the soft hiss made by her slippers moving in the short rough grass. "Well, Alas, what are we going to do with him? Emis has our jewel, we have his woman. Shall we make an exchange?"

"No," came the hard much-hated voice of Alasperion. "We'll have another little wager. Winner take all."

"Leave me out of this pot," said the woman Elez-melec. "I wouldn't sweeten it. I'd fry both your livers if doing so could get me something I wanted. But I'd likely end up with a pan of grease and little else."

Emistisiguo laughed. "Alasperion, forget the wager. Take the jewel and let my witch go." I opened my eyes to see him fling a glittering spark of blue-white fire across the space separating him from Alasperion. Alasperion, surprised, flung up his hands to catch the jewel, but the woman, with an unbelievably quick lizard like movement of her arm, snatched it from the air. She was smiling like a cat which has fed very well on canaries.

"I'm agreeable," said she.

"I'm not!" snarled Alasperion. "We wager, Emistisiguo. The jewel, your witch and your desmesne —"

"Against what that belongs to you, Alasperion? You've nothing I want, not even that bauble."

"I've your freedom," Alasperion told him with cold emphasis. The menace in his voice made me roll to my feet and leap to where Smith stood within a circle of light shed by torches. He grasped my shoulder strongly and steadied me.

"Lost my wand," I gasped softly.

"That's all right," he replied and smiled at me reassuringly.

"Oh, she's alive," came the lazy tones of Elez-melec.

"And both are still in my power," said Alasperion. "Emistisiguo, I hold you. I'll kill your witch out of hand — you've only one chance of defeating me. The wager."

Emistisiguo looked at me, then at the ring of horsemen. Yes, his hands had been tied by my capture — they made me hostage. My eyes followed his, assessing the position of the horsemen. I nudged him.

"Smith, play the wager. Garden witch's luck."

He looked at me speculatively. I put my hands on his shoulders. "Garden witch's luck," I repeated, and he smiled.

"Yes, indeed," said he and took my face in his hands gently. Then he turned to Alasperion. "Keep the jewel, I'm not interested. My witch's freedom, my freedom and desmesne — which you have coveted for so long."

Alasperion, eyes glittering, nodded. At a signal from him, two horsemen came forward bearing a large game board and a box of counters and pieces. In the unsteady light of the torches, they set up some strange game, the way of which I could not understand. Emistisiguo and Alasperion crouched at opposite ends of the board and began to handle the dice and move the pieces. The woman Elez stood to one side. I stood behind Smith and watched the weird scene: the two men in the uncertain pools of red-gold light, leaning over a board of blue-green glowing

patterns and signs that seemed to dance above the dark squares, quivering in the darkness; the tall woman like a column of white light, her sculptured countenance mocking and amused; the ring of red-clad horsemen and their restless horses, showing a white-rimmed eye, a muzzle, a hand, a booted foot, a pawing hoof in the wind-wavered illumination of their upheld torches; and behind, the dark stretches of the mysterious Wild Lands.

I could hear Alasperion breathing and the intermittant click of the dice. Elez-melec stood like a statue. I shook my shoulders gently until my cloak fell away from the hilt of my sword.

Suddenly Emistisiguo struck the board, sweeping away the counters, the pieces and the dice. "Foul," he said coldly. "Alasperion, you're a compulsive gambler which is a bad thing to be when you are also a compulsive cheat." And he struck Alasperion across the face.

A horseman raised his whip and I unsheathed my heavy rune sword and threw it. It sang through the air, sliced the thong, startling man and mount, and returned to my hand. I whirled, tossed the blade again. The low-pitched humming of it caused the horses to lay back their ears and sidle nervously and uncontrollably about. The watery pale-green light emanating from the blade blinded inimical eyes.

Pandemonium. Alasperion had reared to his feet, a peculiar mixture of guilt and fury twisting his handsome features; Emistisiguo faced him, hands on hips and feet braced. And Elez-melec, she who also bore a name which was a word of Power, suddenly let out a shriek that fairly ripped the night in two.

"A cheat?" she screamed. Blue fire leaped from her body, she was surrounded by a blazing deadly corona that flicked out tongues of fire. The men and the horses of Alasperion screamed, agonized, and melted away in that lethal glare. She spun on Alasperion and dealt him a blow across the face that should have twirled his head on his neck. "And you really think I'd ally myself with such as you — a greedy, losing, clumsy cheat, a half man, a father's mistake, a mother's misery? Pah! Pig!" The other hand flashed out and Alasperion staggered.

I stared, mouth a-gape. Emistisiguo turned and grasped my arm. "Quickly, while they are occupied," he whispered, and there was a faint smile on his face.

We moved swiftly into the darkness.

But our going was not as unnoted as we wished. "Emistisiguo, I haven't finished with you!" announced Elez-melec, her voice ear-piercingly shrill with fury.

Smith shoved me between the shoulders. "Quickly!" he hissed. He shouted over his shoulder, "But I'm done with you, my dear!" and broke into a run.

But something, a premonition perhaps, made me half-turn. I saw the unhumanly beautiful face of Elez-melec, then the furious face of Alasperion. I saw his arm go up and jerk.

I saw it spinning through the night, a dim silver wheel. Elez-melec looked inexpressibly shocked, an emotion which sat quite oddly on her ruthless features. Alasperion looked, strangely enough, surprised. Beside me, Smith stopped short with a curious cough.

I caught him as he fell. He, too, looked surprised and a trifle indignant as well. "Ass!" he snapped, "that Alasperion." I held him close and he smiled at me. "Pretty Aisha." Elez-melec came swiftly and knelt beside us, long diamond eyes tear-filled. "Oh, Emis," she whispered and reached out a hand, but looking at my face she drew back.

"Ah, go on, Elez," he whispered. "Clear out. Just get that Alas for me."

"Yes," she said simply and suddenly the plains were dark and empty, just Smith and myself.

I gently worked the dagger from his back for fear of poisons on the blade. I could not staunch the blood; it ran warm and dark across my hands, soaking into the

cold ground.

"Come here, Aisha," he muttered and I turned him over and cradled him once more across my lap.

"Alone at last," he grinned.

"Smith, how can you?" I choked.

"Easily, with your pretty face in front of me. Never mind your herbs and bandages, sweetheart. Come here and kiss me," he said and I did.

"That really calls for something more," he continued in a satisfied voice.

"Do you hurt?" I asked anxiously.

"Not at all. Hold me closer." I did.

"You and I, Aisha," he said, "are going . . ."

But we went nowhere and did nothing together. He left me alone on the heath.

I WENT back to the Sundial Garden. I stayed longer than I ever have since I received my wand and became a journey witch. I joined in the meditations in the groves, dug and sweated in the gardens, spent many hours in the stillrooms and worked on illuminated manuscripts.

I could not weep. Tears were insufficient to express the utter desolation I felt, so strong a sense of loss that even I was surprised, for we had only known each other a very short time, Smith and I. I think it was the manner and the cause of his death that made me so unhappy — such a senseless and unnecessary episode, such mighty consequences for what was essentially a petty matter.

For Smith had willingly relinquished the jewel. And what could land, a *desmesne* mean to those who control the very elements? It was as if two kings squabbled over a common cotton shirt, declared war and laid waste a country.

Another memory haunted me. Smith's passing away in my arms had been a literal passing away, as it is with those of the Summer Country: his body had gone with his spirit. I kept reliving the sensation — my arms burdened, then suddenly empty, cradled around air. Such a thing was a weight on a mortal mind.

And, too, the certainty that a door had been slammed in my face. What would it have been like to have really known *Emistisiguo*, to know his mind and his moods, perhaps even his love? I would never know now — but, oh! that void of ignorance ached unbearably.

After some time I went back on the road. I met new people, saw new places, breathed new air, heard new songs and stories. I walked, and *Gentian*, who, after her release from the binding spell, had found me sitting on the *Soria Besh*, trotted along beside me. And the savor had gone out of my life. The world lacked salt. I kept on walking.

One day, in summer, while I was walking through the Duchy of *Zandemala*, a man hailed me from the roadside. "Journey witch!" he called. "Are you a healer?"

I turned and nodded. "Yes. Do you need my help?"

"No. But I owe a journey witch healer and thought I'd give you a good meal as partial payment."

This was not an uncommon practice so I turned aside. He was a golden lion of a man with an open face, tawny hair on head and face, peach colored skin and a genial full-lipped smile. He had a golden burro tied to a tree — a ridiculous touch that brought a grin to my face. For the burro's coat was the same color as his own mane and it was too easy to make comparisons between animal and master.

"Sit," invited the man. "What may I call you?"

I sat where he indicated, on a stump in a grassy clearing beneath the roadbank, and surveyed the magnificent spread, all laid out on a snowy cloth perked with a graceful arrangement of leaves and grasses. It was an elaborate array of fresh fruit, bread, little pots of honey, pale and dainty curls of butter between dark green

leaves, cold tea, pickles, boiled eggs sliced and nestled on beds of crisp lettuce, mushrooms, oysters on their shells and chunks of salmon sprigged with parsley. There were sherbets for dessert, kept cool in buckets of ice. An effete luncheon to find laid out in the wilderness; I assume that my host was an eccentric Zandemalan noble (and Zandemala is full of such) and prepared to enjoy myself.

It was much easier than I had anticipated. The man's casual cheerfull company was obscurely comforting; well, there was something of Smith in his insouciant attitude toward his extravagant meal and invitation to a total stranger. The whole outlandish situation seemed commonplace to him; I could not but accept his own valuation of his hospitality.

"Al fresco," I commented in an approving tone. "And quite elegant. Much better than most meals to which a journey witch is accustomed."

"I am pleased that you are pleased," replied my host. "May I sit beside you?"

"As you please," I answered in surprise. "Is there something you wish?"

"I wish you to be pleased," said he and grinned at me quite impudently.

With profound amazement, the kind that suspends thought and makes you move slowly, I rose to my feet and stared incredulously at his mild face and brown eyes which were the color of sugar cane syrup, and the tawny hair and beard and upswept mustachios curling toward his nostrils. In a very small voice I asked him, "What do I call you?"

And he slipped his hand inside my hood, touching lightly that barely visible scar lying below the crescent of hair on my cheekbone.

"Would Smith do?" said he.

I suddenly found my voice. "Yes," I answered, "Smith will do very nicely." ●

Melanie Rawls

I am a native of Atlanta but am now living in Thomasville, GA, a small deep south Georgia town, with my pharmacist husband, Nathaniel Abrams, Jr. I was graduated from Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY in June 1976. I am 26 years old (27 by October 1980).

I write poetry as well as short stories and have published a poetry collection entitled *Melange*. *Essence* magazine published two of my short stories in their September and December 1979 issues. My poems have appeared in various publications.

I am a member of the Southern Collective of African-American Writers (SCA-AW), the Southeastern Writers Association, Inc. and the Atlanta Chapter of the National Association of Media Women.

"The Witch and the Man in the Mountain" is one of several short stories I have written about the inhabitants of the Westsouth Region. I hope eventually to produce a short story collection or a fantasy novel using these characters.

Why we chose this story

This witch is very appealing, as is her romance. The ending delivers a very nice, uplifting surprise.





They Took It All Away ————— *continued from Back Cover*

amounts bet on horses seven through twelve. Also, a section of the infield lake appears to have been removed: one discouraged swan as I peer over the rail swims to the edge and plummets. It is unfair. But reasonable. The aliens are consistent. We are gone.

"What do you see on the seven, Johnny?" a horseplayer to my right on the concrete lawn asks. There is no one else in the vicinity; the ranks of the punters having also undergone attrition. There cannot be more than five thousand of us at Aqueduct today. The horseplayer, a middleaged man who bears a dim resemblance to me (most of us are middleaged) turns toward me looking helpless. "I can't read the board. My eyes going bad?"

"Not at all. Half the tote's gone."

"The tote too. Why? Why are they doing that to us, Johnny?"

"I don't know," I say. "All of the world is being chewed off, bit by bit in these recent weeks, you know."

"Aliens," the horseplayer says, "that's my theory. But why do they have to take the tote?"

"They don't leave you much," I agree. "Maybe the scientists will come up with an answer."

"No answers." The man's chin heaves with rage, he takes a program from his inside pocket and makes an angry notation. "Bunch of liars, that's all, just like trainers. They'll never tell us anything."

"Hard to say." I assume a certain cheer for the occasion. "Still, life does go on."

Indeed it does. And does. Figures on the tote wink; odds roll on the first six

horses. The four, I note, has dropped sharply to second favoritism. I record that in my mind.

"Easy enough for you to say that," the man says petulantly; his voice up a register. "Just stand there and take it. You know something I don't? You holding back information on the seven horse?"

I shrug. "No one knows anything. I told you, they're working on it; when they come up with something I'm sure they take measures. Meanwhile, we just have to struggle on."

"Crazy," the man says. "It's all crazy." He folds his program and stuffs it away. "Took the tote," he says. "Got to bet the three then, got to bet a horse whose odds I know. Maybe it's an omen."

Maybe it is. Omens are all that a horseplayer has after a while. Maiden claimers drift onto the track, flash of colors, a few offhand sounds from management's bugler. The bugler's red jacket seems a trifle askew and his eyes glazed but then again, he too has been under a strain. So have we all. Relatives may be missing or his equipment locker. The field at least is intact. Twelve horses emerge from the paddock. The jockeys crouch over their ears whispering little secrets. Strips of paper vault the rail as an errant wind catches them. The horses canter.

"Look at the three," the horseplayer says. "Rank as hell but he may be under a hold. Well, it's a cheap field. All of them stiffs. Forty-five to one; what do I have to lose? He's working the bit; I think he's got a chance, don't you?"

"I don't know too much about the races," I say. "I just came out for the escape, tell you the truth." Strictly speaking this is not so—I have learned a little about horses in recent weeks—but it must do. "Maybe he could win," I say, "but then again, maybe not. Who knows?"

The horseplayer shrugs and backs away. I have been disqualified for interference. "I like the three," he says. "He's got a little breeding and the workouts ain't too bad. He showed some form upstate in August; I could go to him and lay off a little on the seven blind or I could back up the three place and show. It's only money, right?"

It is only money. Life, as I have observed, goes on; our ability to manage through these three weeks is astonishing and I do not think only of Aqueduct when I say this. Still, what was the alternative? Our world is being eaten away but the convulsions of the century have in a sense prepared us. Metaphors. Realities. I think about things like this.

"Soon I bet him," the horseplayer mumbles. "One more flash."

Over his shoulder, I witness a little section of the clubhouse disappear suddenly. One instant it is there, the next it has been replaced by the characteristic murk. The incision is not clean; through jagged edges I can see five or six rows of seats filled with panicked gentry, an attendant, a window.

"Look at that," I say. "Isn't that something?" It is the first time I have actually witnessed a Disappearance; most of them have happened at night. It is something to see although not quite as chilling as I might have envisioned. My throat certainly does not constrict with horror. A section of the clubhouse is simply unceremoniously, *missing*.

"Isn't what something?"

"Part of the clubhouse just disappeared over there, behind you."

"Got no time for that, Mack," the horseplayer says, staring at the inner dirt course. The horses, extended to full gallop, move past, ears tight against their heads, eyes fixed and bright, outriders singing. They are oblivious of the clubhouse. "The seven," the horseplayer says, "I want to bet it but I need a price, it's ridiculous." A swan puddling delicately in what is left of the lake panics from memory, flutters; we exchange glances of memory and commiseration. The

clubhouse has certainly upset it. "I'll do what I can," the horseplayer mumbles, "got to do what you can." Eyes to the ground he scuffs his feet, wheezes into a gelatinous run, staggering up the concrete incline toward the mutual windows. I find a reassuring stability, a confidence in his waddle and watch him with some tranquility.

Horseplayers, if nothing else, are resilient. This is what has taken me to South Ozone Park, an escape, this from the gloom of seeing the world devoured. Still—I reflect—how much longer can they keep the tracks open? How long any simulacra of normality? The city has lost an estimated fifteen percent of its area and thirty percent of its population, many of whom must have been horseplayers or otherwise occupied by the New York Racing Association. The crowd is way below weekday average.

Nonetheless, it is an amiable gesture of the Racing Association. Nor are they to be praised alone: this policy has prevailed generally in the three weeks, life going on, but nowhere, I must aver, with the elan, the insouciance now present at the track. No one runs to or from the jagged clubhouse, no sirens sound. With four minutes until post time there are material pursuits to occupy. Would only, I think, that I could stay longer and consider this but my period of respite is at an end. For all its benefits, the visit cannot be extended. My life goes on as well. I must leave and deal with the situation in a different fashion.

Walking the concrete lawn slowly, I debate whether I might bet the three myself but decide that this could only take my hour of peace to an extended and unpleasant level of involvement. I have never bet a horse; the feeling would be exquisite but my emotional reserves are limited. No then, no bet. I trot the steps below the grandstand thinking of demolition as I bravely hit the path. It is then that the wall to my right disappears. Instantaneously there is a grey space open to the air through which I can see the parking lot and its scattering of cars.

My instincts rage for flight but I calm them. The Disappearances, for unknown reasons, do not affect the structural integrity of what is not taken. The middle floors of buildings have vanished and steel probes cutting through the emptied space have gone . . . but floors above remain balanced imprecariouly, sandwiching the air with floors below. Even knowing this, it is difficult for me not to put my hands on head and cower to the stones, waiting for the grandstand to topple. The archetypal swamp it is called, although not here.

I stroll outside the gates. Vendors are still selling information sheets; it is only the third race post parade I have witnessed. "No thank you," I say to them politely and hand off my program to a small boy for resale, walk toward my car. "All in a day's work," I murmur. There are little gaps and open spaces in the lot and I fear that my Buick might be gone but it is not, it is there in all of its decayed forthrightness, handkerchief pennant at the top of the antenna waving. No excuses; this blessed hour of relief from the pressures is over and now I must return to work in the statistical section where the Disappearances are charted. I am what might be called a clerk.

Distant shouts from the grandstand indicate the end of the race. They would not bellow so for a mere Disappearance. I wonder how the three did.

On the way to the unit, however, I decide to make a quick stop in the apartment: it has been a while. Perhaps avoiding my wife has been a mistake. At least she thinks so.

"You're totally irresponsible," my wife says when I make the mistake of admitting where I have been. "They've been calling here and didn't believe me when I said you were out. They thought you were hiding or something."

"I don't care what they think."

"That's what I mean. What are you doing, going to the racetrack when you're supposed to be working on this? They're counting on you—"

"Research," I say. "Was trying to determine whether the Disappearance took place in the same way at recreational areas; whether anxiety might have something to do with it." This is allowance class lying, I think. "Afraid it's all the same, though."

"You're not doing anything, the whole division isn't—"

"Well," I say, "I'm only one of thousands working on this you know. Please leave me alone."

It occurs to me—this is unfortunate—that it would be easier if Sybil were among the thirty percent missing, even though it would only increase my guilt. It is not her fault that I hate her; Sybil is a moderately attractive woman who gives me more, perhaps, than I deserve. The problems are of deeper origin.

"You're not doing anything," she says. "You're a fraud." She leans forward in her chair, buffs her nails a little, takes a sip from the scotch glass on her left. Sybil like many abandoned wives is a bit of an alcoholic. "We lost a little of the closet about an hour ago," she says. "It could have been me; I was in there only a minute earlier."

"Really."

"Come in the bedroom and look at it."

"I'll take your word for it."

"And the building. The building across the way, three seven nine two, you know?" She clutches the glass. "The seventh and eighth floors are gone."

"I'm not surprised," I say. "Randomness reaches everywhere. Just don't get paranoid, Sybil. Perhaps I'll go now; I just wanted to say hi."

"Please," she says, a fine look of appeal settling. "I can't stand just waiting around here for the end. I know I'm going to disappear soon. I don't get phone calls any more; I can't reach anyone. We've got to get out of here."

She is panicking. "Don't be ridiculous," I say, "there's nowhere to go and you know it. Actually, the Disappearances run ten percent less in New York; it must be density and the atmosphere. Sioux City, Iowa is gone," I point out solemnly. "We're safest here; we just have to hold out and hope for the best, it's out of our hands."

Not awaiting a reaction I walk into the bedroom which indeed is lacking half a closet although the contents are otherwise untouched. The casual (or highly selective?) nature of Disappearances has been noted. The telephone table reeks of scotch. "So it's gone," I say returning to the living room. "It's just a piece of it and they probably won't be back for a while; they tend not to repeat, usually. Stay calm and I'm going downtown."

"I think you have to be crazy," Sybil says intensely. She balances her glass on a palm. "How can you take this so casually? How can any of us? The world's being swallowed and *where is it all going anyway?*"

"You're drunk, Sybil. Lie down."

"You know what? I think you *wanted* this, me too; we don't want to take responsibility for our lives any more. But it's all going away, *in vino veritas*—"

"Lie down. Go shopping. Eat something."

"You're so reasonable."

"Of course I'm reasonable," I say. "What else is there to be? Life goes on, and I don't know when we'll see each other again so do you want to say goodbye?"

Apparently she finds this suggestive. She covers her breast with a crooked arm, puts down the scotch. "Stay away from me you monster."

"You misunderstand," I say gently and leaning over, bestow upon her forehead

the gentlest and most accommodating of kisses to her cool, strained skin, feeling an odd tenderness. "I wouldn't do it to you," I add gently.

She springs from the chair, butting my chin, lurches toward the table holding the glass like a tennis ball and then throws it. Nothing happens; it hits the wall with a discouraged thud and falls harmlessly to the carpet spraying ice. "Get out!" she says, "Just get out of here," and hits me in the stomach. Yes, it is time for me to leave.

"Surely," I say apologetically, moving toward the door, "absolutely" and she winds up to hit me again but my hand is on the doorknob and I sidle through. "Please stay calm," I say. She slams the door. I hear locks click, then the watery sound of the police lock being engaged.

Well. Be that as it may. We all react to catastrophe in our own way; so doth Sibyl, so doth I. Perhaps we will be able to sort it out later. Now my thoughts are already fixed on getting to the Institute as quickly as possible. I use the stairwell, lope groundward thinking that going to Aqueduct might have been irresponsible but going home was pointless. I let sentiment interfere and what did it gain me? A third of the world is gone, I am still engaging in gestures. There is profound material there.

Outside, I stare at the building opposite. How stately indeed those upper stories balanced in the air; they do not even move in the dry winds. Wisps of apprehension curl through me and I think: is this also a symbolic truncation of our lives? Are the pieces and persons we are losing symbols of that quality of life stolen by western culture? By our own shrunken inner lives? Why don't the aliens help us out, send a direct message?

This line of thought is so dismaying—if interesting—that I could ponder it at length but a taxi crosses my line of vision and discharges a panting woman and dismal small boy; I interrupt my consideration to signal the driver, and get inside. The faster I get to work, the faster I will find restoration.

The driver and I talk a bit. His name is Morris Weiss and his wife and son disappeared five days ago . . . but he does not see where mourning will change anything so he continues to work. They were on a guided tour of the Empire State Building when a small portion of the observation tower was sliced away and Gert and Billy Weiss, along with some others, were swept away. Morris had warned Gert not to go to high places but Gert, assuming the world was ending, had wanted a last fling. "Too bad," Morris says gallantly, "but what can you do? Can't bring them back and I'll be joining them soon enough, myself."

I agree with this. The Morris Weiss approach has more wisdom than Sybil's although a shade less than the horseplayer's. For the remainder of the drive we say nothing, having established mutual respect and being locked—or at least I am locked—into private thoughts which may not be disparate. It is a companionable feeling even though we remain poised on disaster's edge.

At Fifty-Seventh street, a detour is made. A cop, leaning in, says that a small section of the Avenue of the Americas between Fifty-Second and Fifty-Third has vanished to a depth of two hundred feet, making travel on that already impassable avenue somewhat harder. I gratefully overtip Morris. "What should I do with this?" he asks, staring at the bills and coins and I say I surely do not know. I get out of the cab. Jauntily—one must maintain appearances—I wave at the cop and Morris and walk toward the office.

As I do so an intimation comes at me off-angles:

Perhaps I am the alien who is the causative agent of the disappearances; perhaps I have been placed upon this barbaric planet (in their guise) to observe and slowly disassemble for the purposes of conquest. Part of the process would, of

course, be an amnesiac block. I would not *know* myself to be the alien since this would only lead to conflicts of conscience, seizures of ambivalence; I would take myself to be what the hypnotics say I am and meanwhile go subconsciously about my work. (But the unconscious conflicts would manifest themselves in my "marriage", "activities", "work".) There is an odd credibility to this which I find invigorating. For one thing it gives me a sense of control without which one could hardly survive civil service.

"Disappear," I say experimentally to a passing clump of humans. I might as well try. I wave fingers, mumble neologisms. They Disappear. I giggle nervously. They plummet into an enormous space open before me. I almost stumble in myself. Shocked, I halt.

"Remarkable," I say, "remarkable."

Sun dazzles. Dazzle induces guilt: I think of all the trouble I have caused this simple if wayward planet. Pedestrians and drivers eye the new emptiness nervously, stare. Some think that I am a survivor and reach for me.

I wave them away. "Sorry," I say. Memory seems to be returning quickly. I am Deponent Y of Star System X and so on and so forth, on a set course of destruction. Perhaps, though, I have gone insane (disassociative reaction, Sybil?) and this is merely a means to cope. Who is to know? The horses were beautiful in the paddock. It is a world not without beauty, whatever I am.

"The horses are on the track," I say loudly.

An intensity of focus overtakes. I am eyed with much nervousness by the crowd. I shrug, wave a hand, resist the urge to buck-and-wing.

"Come back," I say, "come back."

The world, groaning, reassembles. The departed reappear, the hole fills: in the distance I hear the Avenue of the Americas, grumbling, reconstituted.

"There is no equivalent of horseracing in our system," I say to puzzled witnesses. "I loved it."

And then I head off happily to make the ninth.

Headquarters will be extremely angry, yes. But this kind of thing happens to us all the time. ●

Barry N. Malzberg

Barry N. Malzberg is the author of twenty-six science fiction novels, eight collections, eight (co-edited) anthologies, *BEYOND APOLLO* (Random House, 1972) and first winner of the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for best sf novel of the year. Other novels include *GALAXIES*, *HEROVIT'S WORLD*, *CHORALE*, *THE MEN INSIDE*, *UNDERLAY*, *IN THE ENCLOSURE*, *TACTICS OF CONQUESTS*. Most recent collections are *MALZBERG AT LARGE* (Ace, 1979), *THE MAN WHO LOVED THE MIDNIGHT LADY* (Dou-

bleday, 1980). He has had over 200 science fiction stories in all of the magazines and original anthologies since 1967; also many stories in mystery and men's magazine markets. Former editor (4/68 - 10/68) *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC*.

Why we chose this story

A thought-stirring tale that leaves you with many possibilities to ponder. Few authors can leave you hanging so successfully between wonderment and realization.

A man in a dark suit and tie is seated on a simple wooden chair. He is looking towards the viewer with a serious expression. The background is a dramatic, high-contrast scene of large, billowing white clouds against a dark sky. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the man's face and suit.

THEY TOOK IT ALL AWAY

Barry N. Malzberg

Now they seem to be working their way into Aquaduct race track in South Ozone Park in the borough of Queens, New York. One would have appreciated areas of privacy and containment in this reduced world; places, that is, which the aliens would regard as off-limits to their savage plans. (They *must* be aliens, I have decided.) No such luck. Half the tote is missing, that part which lists the odds and

— Continued on 126

Illustrated by Gary Freeman